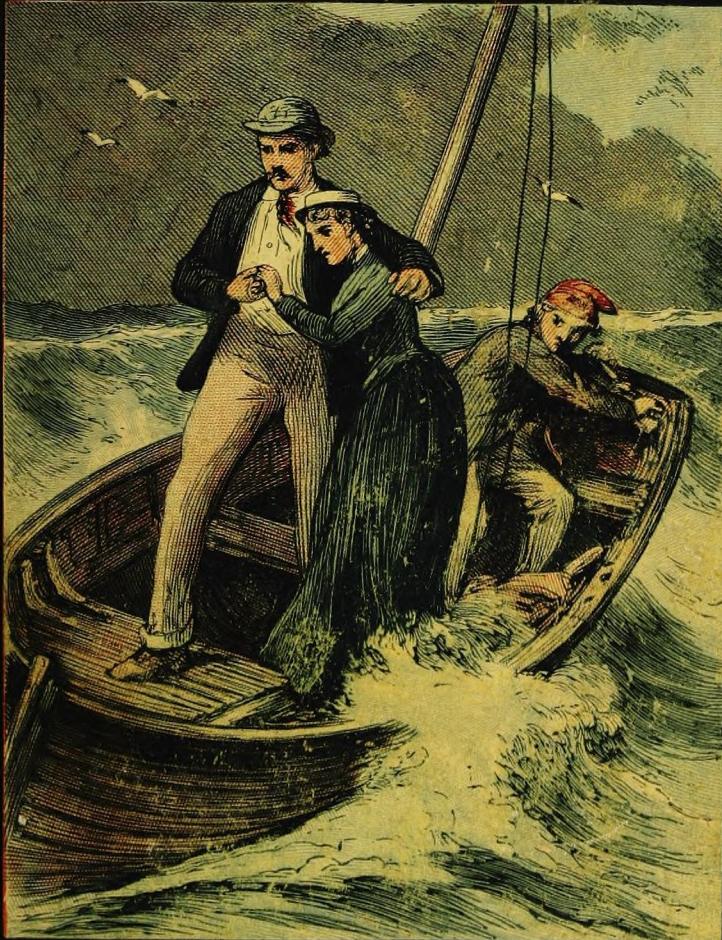


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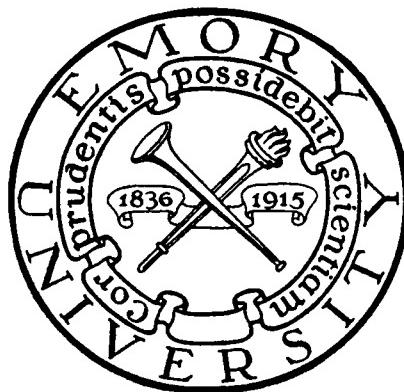
Adrian Vidal



By W. E. Morris

LONDON: SMITH, ELDER, & CO.

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ADRIAN VIDAL

A D R I A N V I D A L

BY

W E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF

'NO NEW THING' 'MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC' 'MATRIMONY'
ETC.

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ADRIAN VIDAL

CHAPTER I

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

A YOUNG man was sitting before a writing-table in his bedroom at that overgrown caravanserai, the Schweizerhof, at Lucerne. By his elbow lay a burnt-out pipe ; a few books of reference and various scribbled notes surrounded the blotting-book over which he was bending ; while beneath his hand a blank half-sheet of foolscap was waiting—and had, indeed, been waiting some little time—to receive the first strokes of the hovering pen. But the pen continued to hover dubiously ; the hand that held the pen shook ; the brain which should have been conveying directions to the hand was worried and unmanageable, as well it might be. For of all positions in which an author can choose to place his writing-table, that beside an open window overlooking a glaring lake is probably the least advantageous ; and, of all buildings, an hotel is about the most unsuitable for the work of composition. Again, of all hotels the Schweizerhof is one of the busiest ; finally, of all towns in Christendom Lucerne is quite the most distractingly noisy. Church bells jangle and boom there perpetually ; steamers shriek, carts rattle over the stones ; porters, for ever loading and unloading omnibuses, yell at one another ; and the proprietors of the hotel—fearing, no doubt, that these cheerful sounds may not suffice to keep up the spirits of their guests—have not shrunk from adding to them a full private band, which scrapes and tootles indefatigably beneath the windows. From early morning to midnight, or near it, the hubbub rages, until one ceases to wonder that the poor clerk,

feverishly totting up accounts in the *burcau*, should look so like an escaped lunatic.

The author on the second floor was already beginning to display points of resemblance to that overworked official. His face was haggard, his sighs were piteous to hear, and his fair hair would have been dishevelled if it had been long enough. As it was, he had only succeeded in rubbing all trace of a parting out of it, and causing it to stand up in abrupt tufts here and there, so that anyone who had not known what he was about might have supposed him to have just tumbled out of bed. For the rest, he was a good-looking young fellow enough, his forehead being broad and square, his nose straight, and the grey eyes beneath his somewhat arched brows large and expressive. A slight moustache hardly concealed his mouth, which a physiognomist would at once have pronounced to be the mouth of an artist or an imaginative writer. A practised physiognomist might, even at this early period of Adrian Vidal's career, have seen reason to place him in the latter category, for he bore certain outward signs of the nervous literary temperament, and already upon his forehead were faintly traced those horizontal lines which the plough of Time so soon deepens into furrows. The lines were rather more perceptible than usual just now, owing to the causes above alluded to.

'Why, one might as well be in London, you know,' he exclaimed aloud, addressing himself in a tone of gentle remonstrance to space. 'In all my born days I never heard such an infernal din. And this in the month of May, too! What can it be like in summer, when the tourists are loose?'

Adrian Vidal had never been at Lucerne before, or he certainly would not have fallen into the error of supposing that it is a quiet retreat at any time, unless it be in the dead of the winter—and even then, most likely, the church bells do not cease from troubling. In the month of May travellers alight there from all quarters. Some, like our misguided author, come from the north; not a few invade it from over the German frontier; but it is the south, whence the great army of invalids is then wending its way homewards, that supplies the little town with the bulk of its fugitive guests. From Egypt, from Algeria, from Italy, from the Riviera, they pour over the mountains, or burrow under them, and alighting, with querulous buzzings and murmurings, for a night, pass on, to be succeeded on the following day by a crowd as large and as uproarious. Just now—for the afternoon was on the wane,

and two trains and a steamer had come in—a strong contingent of them had arrived at the Schweizerhof. Vidal could hear them stamping up and down the corridors, calling to their servants, scolding the waiters, ringing their bells, and slamming their doors.

Presently there came a knock at his own door, one of those irresolute, deprecating taps which are so much more irritating to the nerves than a loud bang.

‘Oh, *come in!*’ said the young man resignedly.

However, nobody took advantage of the permission, so he sighed and began to cudgel his brains once more. After about a minute the timid signal was repeated.

‘*Entrez ! Herein ! Favorisca ! Come in !*’ shouted Vidal savagely. ‘Stay out then,’ he concluded in a more philosophical tone, and returned to his work.

Then the door was slowly and creakingly opened about a foot, and through the aperture appeared the head and shoulders of a mild-looking old gentleman with long grey hair and spectacles. ‘Oh,’ said the intruder in accents of disappointment, ‘then this is not my room after all. I was afraid it couldn’t be.’

‘It isn’t,’ answered Vidal, more curtly than courteously. His manners and his temper were both fairly good in a general way; but it was rather too provoking that anyone should have entertained a doubt as to the ownership of the apartment after having been bawled at in four languages.

‘I beg your pardon, I’m sure,’ said the old gentleman, retreating at once. Nevertheless, he did not quite shut the door, and as Vidal, with an imprecation, was starting up to rectify this omission, the grey head of his tormentor was thrust in again. ‘I suppose,’ began the latter, hesitatingly, ‘you couldn’t oblige me by telling me the number of my room, could you?’

‘Well, really,’ returned Vidal, half laughing, half annoyed, ‘I’m afraid not. How could I, you know?—considering that I never set eyes on you before.’

‘No, no—to be sure,’ agreed the other. ‘It’s very awkward,’ he continued, rubbing his chin in perplexity. ‘You see, I can’t even remember which storey it was on. And yet I did make a point of noticing it, too, before I went out.’

‘Hadn’t you better apply to the hall porter?’ said the young man.

‘Dear me, yes—of course! so I will. A very good idea!

I am much obliged to you, sir, for suggesting it,' cried the other, brightening up amazingly. And without more ado he trotted off to put it into execution.

'What an original old person!' muttered Vidal, as he seated himself at his table again. Then he laughed a little, and so fell into a good humour, which was always an easy process with him. 'Writing be hanged!' said he, shutting up his blotting-book and beginning to whistle. 'There's no greater mistake than writing when one is not in tune for it. It's a waste of time and a waste of vital power; and besides that, it's apt to get one into the fatal habit of being satisfied with something less than one's best.'

This last reflection will sufficiently show that Mr. Vidal had as yet but small experience of his craft. A man who can't complacently put up with work which falls below the utmost limit of his powers must either be a genius or a tyro, and it is certain that Vidal was not a genius. His was the happier lot of possessing talents slightly above the average, keen faculties of observation, and a mind quick to receive impressions. It has already been said that he was physically favoured above his fellows; so that it should seem as if nothing had been lacking to make this young author a thoroughly contented man, unless it were money—of which, indeed, he had not quite so much as he could have desired. Yet even this deficiency could hardly be counted a drawback to happiness, since he had enough for present needs, and looked forward to making his fortune in the pleasantest of all possible ways—namely, by his own exertions. When it is added that the proposed exertions were to be employed in the composition of novels it will be more than ever apparent how young Mr. Vidal was.

He pushed aside his writing-table, and, resting his elbows upon the window-sill, looked out upon the blue lake, with its wooded promontories, and the snowy mountains of Uri rising cloud-capped in the distance. 'It's all very lovely,' he murmured; 'only one can't enjoy it, unfortunately. Good Heavens! what a paradise one might make of this place if one could but sweep away the hotels and the steamers and the tourists at a blow! "Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile," as the hymn says.'

He lowered his gaze to the strip of garden directly beneath him, and the shady promenade on the quay, where assorted specimens of humanity were congregated in large numbers,

happily unconscious of their vileness. The band, with preliminary squeaks and grunts, was tuning up for a fresh outburst ; about the low wall which bordered the lake hung a crew of those loungers—touts, guides, boatmen, and others—who batten upon the modern wanderer ; the modern wanderer himself was exhaustively represented in every variety of garb.

‘That’s uncommonly like Heriot’s back,’ mused Vidal, his eye falling upon a rather shabby shooting-coat among a host of others. And then, with more animation—‘By Jove ! it *is* Heriot’s back. What an odd chance !’

He seized his hat, ran quickly downstairs, and was presently in a position to deal a resounding slap upon the back which he had identified, and which was a somewhat round one.

The owner of the back started and said mildly, but with a little pardonable irritation, ‘Don’t do that, whoever you are ; I don’t like it.’

He was a man of something under middle age, although his head and his short pointed beard had nearly as many grey hairs as black. His face was one of those which are only qualified as ugly by reason of the poverty of language, and which would have to be called beautiful if it were permissible to define beauty as that which is pleasant to look upon. Heriot’s face, in spite of its snub nose, high cheek-bones, and greyish-brown complexion, was very pleasant to look upon. Its habitual expression was one of mingled humorousness and pathos, which was attractive and also a little puzzling, until you looked more closely and saw that the pathos arose out of evident signs of physical suffering cheerfully borne. His soft brown eyes had an unnatural brilliancy at times, which would of itself have sufficed to exclude him from any chance of doing business with a life insurance office. They lightened up now when he turned round and recognised his assailant.

‘Adrain, of all people !’ he exclaimed. ‘My dear boy, what on earth are you doing at Lucerne ?’

‘Cursing myself for having been such a fool as to come here,’ replied the other, with a laugh. ‘I don’t know what made me fancy it a sequestered nook, in which one might work all day without fear of interruption ; but that was the extraordinary notion that I formed. Something in the sound of the name, I suppose. It doesn’t much matter, after all. I can run up into the mountains in a day or two, and mean-

while I have the satisfaction of seeing you a good month earlier than I expected. And, by the way, what brings *you* here ?'

'Oh, I am here for the excellent reason that I can't travel from Marseilles to London without a break—several breaks, in fact. I am creeping slowly towards my native land with the other cripples.'

'And how are you, Heriot?' asked the younger man, scrutinising his friend with a shade of anxiety. 'Not any worse, I should say, by the look of you.'

'Well, no ; I am pretty much where I was. I am not dead yet, as you see, and that is about all that I can say for myself.'

'It seems to me that you are looking better,' said Vidal ; for he shared the general belief that such speeches are comforting, whether sincere or not.

Heriot laughed ; he did not seem disposed to dwell upon the subject. 'What about the great work ?' he asked. 'Has it been given to an expectant world yet ?'

'Not yet ; but it is upon the point of appearing ; and, to tell you the truth, I have left England as much to escape from the condolences of my friends as for anything else. I feel that it will be a ghastly failure.'

'Why should you be so despondent ?' asked Heriot, smiling.

'Because, when I read it over, I couldn't help seeing what a deadly dull book it was. It has good points—or at least I think so—but then they are not the sort of good points that will be at all likely to strike the general public ; and I am afraid there isn't nearly enough of plot. Ah, those confounded plots ! the publishers ought to provide them for us. Why are we to be bothered and badgered into imagining involved combinations of circumstances ? It isn't about that kind of thing that we want to write, nor in that kind of thing that we hope to interest our readers. Where is the plot in "Tristram Shandy," I should like to know ? For my part, if a novel pleases me, I care no more about the plot than I do about the binding ; do you ?'

'Well, if you ask me, I must confess that I do,' answered Heriot, not caring to point out to his friend that the possession of Sterne's genius is a necessary condition to the employment of Sterne's methods.

'I don't believe you do, all the same,' said the young man ;

'but, of course, theoretically a story ought to be a story, and it is awkward to have no answer ready to such an obvious criticism. I feel very much as I used to do at school after I had sent in a copy of verses about which I had misgivings, and I seem to see the stern critic standing over me with sublime rod. "Now, Vidal, where's your plot?"—"Oh, please, sir, I haven't got one; but I thought if I made the writing very pretty—'" And then the birch twigs whistle through the air, and I have to assume an ignoble posture. Let us talk about something else.'

'It is nearly time to talk about dinner,' remarked Heriot, looking at his watch. 'I suppose you dine at the table d'hôte?'

'Oh, I suppose so.'

'Then you might as well tell them to put us together. By the way, I must introduce you to some very old friends of mine, the Irvines, whom I fell in with yesterday. They are on their way back from Rome. Perhaps,' added Heriot, with a smile, 'you might find them—two of them at least—good subjects to introduce into a work of fiction, though I fancy that poor old Irvine, if you depicted him truthfully, would be pronounced too broad a caricature. He is a great collector of antiquities of all kinds, especially coins; and most likely he could tell you the name of every emperor, king, and consul whose image and superscription have ever been struck; but his powers of memory end absolutely there. I believe that, if you were to stop him suddenly in the street and ask him what his name was, where he lived, where he was at that moment, and whither he was bound, he wouldn't be able, for the life of him, to answer a single one of your questions.'

'I fancy I have seen the old gentleman already,' said Vidal. 'Has he long grey hair and spectacles, and does he look as if he had forgotten, amongst other things, to shave for three days?'

Heriot nodded.

'Ah, then that is my friend. He marched into my room about an hour ago, and seemed quite hurt when I told him that it *was* my room, and that I couldn't assist him towards discovering his own. Does Mrs. Irvine share his peculiarities?'

'No; but she has some of her own. However, you will soon be able to judge of her for yourself. I don't want you to laugh at them too much, though; because, for all their little oddities, they are dear good people, and they have shown me a great deal of kindness at one time and another. A man like

myself, without kith or kin, learns to value his friends, you know.'

'I know that you stick to your friends, Heriot,' said the other, laying his hand upon his companion's shoulder as they re-entered the hotel together.

CHAPTER II

HERIOT'S FRIENDS

VIDAL spoke with some warmth, and had, indeed, good reason for so doing. The friendship which had subsisted for some years between the two men, and which, in the first instance, had been rather of the elder's than of the younger's seeking, was now equally strong on both sides. It was Heriot who had discovered Vidal's literary capabilities, and had put him in the way of contributing those short articles to magazines, by means of which he had first tried his wings ; it was to Heriot that he invariably turned in the moments of despondency and self-distrust to which his temperament made him liable ; and finally, it was Heriot who had once got him out of a scrape which, absurd as it seemed when looked back upon from the heights of mature experience, might easily have had a lamentable conclusion.

That a boy of eighteen should fall in love with his mother's maid is a circumstance not, perhaps, highly creditable to the boy's taste or intelligence, yet one which can hardly be called unprecedented. If, in Adrian's case, the maid had escaped without a slur upon her character, this happy result was probably due less to Susan's rigid virtue than to her vaulting ambition. For, being a young woman endowed not only with beauty of person but with exceptional strength of purpose, she had made up her mind to nothing less than that her mistress's son should marry her, and had actually extorted from him something like a promise to that effect. And so, when he got the better of his fancy and sought safety in flight, she left Mrs. Vidal's service at a moment's notice and followed her faithless swain to London, where there is every reason to believe that she would have achieved her end, had not Heriot been informed of the state of affairs and hastened to the rescue. By what means he contrived

to shake off the tenacious Susan, Vidal never knew precisely. His own view was that he was bound in honour, if not to ruin his whole life, at least to provide as handsomely as his means would allow for the girl whom he had deceived. But Heriot, foreseeing the perils to which payment of black-mail must inevitably lead, had refused to hear of any such thing; and this, perhaps, was not the least of the services which he had rendered to his young friend. The woman had gone away at last, uttering threats of vengeance which had never been carried into execution, and the episode had long ceased to be referred to between the two men; but Vidal had not forgotten it, nor was he the less grateful to his preserver because of the easy and matter-of-course way in which his preservation had been effected.

Heriot, old for his years, disenchanted with life so far as he himself was concerned, and suffering from a disease which at times gave him horrible pain, and might at any moment kill him, had learnt, as many people do under such circumstances, to find his share of the excitement of existence in the joys and hopes and ambitions of others. It was not unnatural that he should have felt specially drawn towards a young fellow who, like Adrian Vidal, possessed exactly the blessings which had been denied to himself—strength, beauty, enthusiasm, and just a touch of that harmless vanity which a worn-out man so readily pardons, and almost loves, in his juniors. Vidal, on his side, had an affection for Heriot which was half filial, half fraternal. He knew that his friend was intellectually and morally his superior; but he knew also that in any perplexity or trouble he could turn to him with absolute confidence, not only in his judgment but in his sympathy; and he well understood that a friend of that stamp is not met with twice in a lifetime. Therefore, as he had an instinctive abhorrence of pain, he pretty generally contrived to put away from him the thought that Heriot's days were numbered; and it was only when, as now, a separation of some months made the slow change for the worse perceptible, that he felt that sudden tightening of the heart-strings with which most of us have reason to be familiar.

While he was washing his hands and brushing his hair before dinner, he did not whistle, as was his wont, and his glass reflected a grave countenance. ‘Egypt hasn't done him a bit of good, poor old chap!’ he muttered. ‘I suppose nothing will ever do him good any more. And yet, so long as he doesn't get worse. How many years is it since those solemn

asses of doctors condemned him to death? Two, or more, I think. After all, pluck is the best doctor, and he has plenty of that.'

Fastening upon this ground for hope, in the absence of a better one, Vidal soon gained the comfort from it which he desired, and went cheerfully downstairs to dinner. He was a little late. The great table-d'hôte room was already full to overflowing; the assembled company of all nations was devouring its food, and growling over it after the manner of all carnivora when freed from social restrictions; waiters in an unpleasant state of warmth were hurrying to and fro, bearing pyramids of plates; and through the open windows were wafted the strains of the untiring band. Presently Vidal made out Heriot beckoning to him from the far end of one of the long tables, at the head of which sat the old gentleman of defective memory who had so irritated him an hour before.

'We have kept a place for you,' Heriot said. 'Let me introduce you to Mrs. Irvine—and Mr. Irvine, who know you very well by name.'

The old gentleman started out of a placid dream, and bowed pleasantly to the new-comer, without, apparently, the smallest recollection of their previous meeting; but Mrs. Irvine held out her hand, and said, with frank heartiness, 'How do you do? So glad to meet you. We have very often heard of you from Mr. Heriot.'

Mrs. Irvine's appearance suggested the idea that she had just arrived from the railway station, and that she had sat beside the window during her journey. She wore a bonnet and a long dust-cloak, which last was flung back from her shoulders, and her grey hair looked as though she had omitted to brush it after having been out in a gale of wind. There was no ostensible reason for her being in a hurry; yet she both spoke and ate as if there were no time to be lost. 'And where have *you* come from, Mr. Vidal? From London? I thought everybody was going to London, not coming away from it, at this time of year. We have been spending the winter in Rome, and have enjoyed ourselves beyond everything—at least, my daughter and I have. I am not quite so sure about Mr. Irvine, who dislikes travelling. Still he really was interested—I was saying that you *were* interested in Rome, John.'

'Eh? Oh, immensely interested,' answered Mr. Irvine.

'I don't know whether you are familiar with Rome, Mr.—er—I beg your pardon, but I didn't quite catch your name.' Vidal was spared the disagreeable duty of re-introducing himself by Mrs. Irvine, whose volubility drowned her husband's half-finished sentence. 'He liked it very much when he got there, as I always told him he would ; and he spent a great deal of his time at Castellani's ; besides which there are all sorts of collections, you know, in Rome, for those who like collections. What I myself enjoy most of all is seeing the people—not, of course, that one doesn't fully appreciate the scenery and the pictures and the ruins ; but I must say I am fond of society, especially of the sort of society that one gets abroad—such a complete change, you know. One makes some really delightful acquaintances, and others which, perhaps, one wouldn't care to keep up at home ; but that only renders them the more entertaining for the time being. I like to see all kinds of people and things ; don't you, Mr. Vidal ? But I am sure you must, because you would naturally be always seeking for material for those charming books of yours.'

A momentary pause, occasioned by the speaker's having hastily swallowed a glass of wine the wrong way, enabled Vidal to observe that his books would doubtless be charming if he had published any, but that he hadn't.

Mrs. Irvine was not disconcerted. 'You write, though,' she persisted. 'I am certain that Mr. Heriot told me you wrote. And after all, I often think it must be a great deal more difficult to compose clever essays and articles and—and all that sort of thing than novels, which can't require any very vast amount of talent, since such numbers of people produce them. Once I began a novel myself, but I have never found time to go on with it. Oh, and, by-the-by, I wonder whether you could help me to find a situation as governess for a very charming Italian lady who is at present just keeping body and soul together by writing for the newspapers, and who was at one time on the stage, and is altogether most accomplished and agreeable. Embroiders quite exquisitely, too, and makes all her own dresses, which I think is so creditable to her, poor thing ! I feel sure that she would be a delightful addition to any household—not, of course, to your own ; only you might just mention her to your friends, and I should be too happy to answer any inquiries. Mrs. Irvine, Cardrew, near Polruth, Cornwall ; telegrams to Polruth station.—Mr.

Heriot, do *you* know of anyone who wants a thorough finishing governess ?'

'Who has been on the stage, embroiders beautifully, writes for the newspapers, and makes her own frocks? No,' answered Heriot thoughtfully, 'I can't call to mind anyone at the present moment; but with such qualifications there ought to be no difficulty at all about placing her. What of your last *protégé*, Mrs. Irvine?—the lady's-maid who had been a nun and was compelled to leave her convent through conviction of the errors of Romanism.'

Mrs. Irvine made a gesture of despair. 'Don't speak of her!' She bent across the table and continued in an impressive whisper, 'It was the most unfortunate thing! Do you know, I did get her a situation—and an excellent one—with an old lady; and though, naturally, she was a little inexperienced, all went well for three or four months, when she began to fail in health, and—well, I can't finish, but I dare say you can guess what happened. Anything more shocking I never heard of; and the old lady was so very angry with me, and said I ought to have known. But, as I told her, how could I know? And I am afraid she can never have been a nun at all.'

'Let us hope not,' said Heriot. 'And how have things been going on at Polruth during your absence?'

'Pretty well, on the whole. But there have been some unfortunate occurrences; and only this morning Mr. Irvine had a letter telling him of a positive disaster. It seems that the Mevagissey men have been fishing in Polruth Bay, which of course they have no sort of business to do. So the Polruth men went out in the middle of the night and cut all the nets adrift, and it wasn't until the morning that they found they had cut away their own nets by mistake. You may imagine what distress this has caused in the place; and what is to be done I can't think, unless I can induce Lord St. Austell to subscribe liberally, which, as you know, will not be an easy matter. However, I must do my best as soon as I get home.'

In this way Vidal was relieved of the functions of a listener, which, to be sure, he had been fulfilling but indifferently from the outset. For he had not been two minutes in the room before the best part of his attention had become concentrated upon a girl of remarkable beauty who was seated opposite to him, and on Heriot's right hand. He had not at first supposed her to be in any way connected with his new

acquaintances, but his neighbour's casual reference to her daughter and Heriot's evident intimacy with the young lady had seemed to point pretty conclusively to the inference that she must be Miss Irvine, though how such parents had come to possess such a child was one of those mysteries with which Nature delights to baffle the evolutionist.

Miss Irvine personified the type of beauty claimed by our island as peculiarly its own. Tall, graceful, with a flawless complexion, and a small head, well set on her shoulders, she had the look of breeding which characterises that type in its highest stage of development. Her hair had in it, besides a touch of gold, several shades of brown, the darkest of these gradations being reproduced in her eyebrows and eyelashes, which last were long and curved. Her eyes also were of uncertain colour, varying from dark blue to light grey, according as the lights fell or her mood influenced her. In a physical sense, therefore, she had been more than generously treated by Fortune : it remained to be seen what inner charms might correspond with or contradict this outer perfection ; and that was not to be determined by a cursory survey. So, at least, Vidal concluded, after studying the girl carefully for a matter of ten minutes. At the end of that time he had discovered that she was of a somewhat dreamy and romantic temperament, that she was totally free from self-consciousness, and that she had a sweet temper, together with rather more pride than was desirable for her own happiness or for the happiness of those nearest to her.

This, to be sure, was a good deal to have found out by merely watching the play of a person's features during so brief a space ; but Vidal prided himself upon his ability to read character, and only wondered that his investigations should have led him to no more definite judgment than the above. One other discovery he had made—namely, that he was beginning to fall a little in love with the fair subject of his analysis ; but this did not disturb him so much as it might be supposed to do by persons who attach a more serious meaning to the phrase than he did. In fact, it did not disturb him at all. His was a susceptible nature, and he was in the habit of falling a little in love with most of the pretty faces that came within his ken. No one was any the worse for these passing fancies, which he was rather disposed to cultivate, having an impression that they exercised a refining and elevating influence upon him.

During the progress of dinner it happened that his eyes more than once met those of his opposite neighbour, and he could not help perceiving that she regarded him with a certain degree of interest and curiosity. That being so, it became a matter of imperative necessity that he should exchange a few observations with her: only he hesitated to break the ice without that preliminary formula which is so essential to the comfort of Englishmen. ‘I wonder why Heriot didn’t introduce me?’ he mused. ‘I’ll get him to do it directly afterwards.’

CHAPTER III

AFTER DINNER

As it turned out, there was no need for the ceremony which Vidal had made up his mind to solicit. When the table-d’hôte was at an end, the greater part of the assemblage, including those five members of it with whom we have to do, trooped out to the colonnade in front of the hotel to listen to the band; and so Vidal presently found himself seated beside Miss Irvine, who at once addressed him. What she said is hardly worth recording. The range of subjects upon which it is possible to open conversation with a total stranger does not afford much scope for originality, nor was Miss Irvine ambitious of achieving small effects. But Vidal was as much delighted with her natural ease of manner as with the soft contralto tones of her voice. For the present, he was quite content to exchange commonplaces with her, to establish the fact that she and he sympathised upon a variety of unimportant points, and to leave the question of a possible closer relation between them to the dim future. Nevertheless, his interest in his companion had so far deepened at the expiration of a quarter of an hour that it was with some considerable inward anxiety that he asked her whether she would be likely to remain a few days at Lucerne.

Mrs. Irvine, who had arrived at an hiatus in her colloquy with Heriot, answered the question. ‘Well, now, we must really talk this over,’ she said, bending forward, with her elbows on her knees. ‘We ought to do the piace properly, now that we are here. Let me see—there’s the Lion, and the bridge

with the Dance of Death, and the organ at the Cathedral : a few hours would exhaust the town, I should say. But then the Rigi railway—and perhaps Pilatus—and oughtn’t we to go round the lake in a steamer ? What do you think, Clare ? Is it worth while to stay a day or two ?

‘I don’t think I care very much, one way or the other,’ answered Miss Irvine, rather disappointingly, after a brief consideration of the matter.

‘It would be a positive sin to leave the place without having been round the lake,’ struck in Vidal eagerly. ‘You ought to devote three days, at the very least, to Lucerne. Could we not make up a party and see what there is to be seen ? For my part, I should never forgive myself if I went away without having studied the Rigi railway. Now, don’t you agree with me, Heriot ?’

‘I am afraid,’ said Heriot, ‘that I am rather inclined to agree with Miss Irvine ; I don’t care much, one way or the other. Still, I am quite ready to do what everybody else wishes.’

Neither his words nor his tone were quite as amiable as usual, and Vidal wondered why. If Heriot had not been Heriot, it would almost have looked as though the green-eyed monster were at work. But, for more reasons than one, that surmise was inadmissible, and presently it seemed to strike the last speaker that he had been wanting in cordiality, for he added briskly, ‘Of course I should enjoy having a day or two with you, Adrian ; and though I have seen the Lake of Lucerne before, other people haven’t. I suppose there is no need for you to hurry home, is there, Mrs. Irvine ?’

‘Well, no doubt they would be able to get on without me for a few days longer,’ replied that lady, making the admission a trifle unwillingly. ‘There are heaps of things that I must see about as soon as I get back ; but after all, two days is only forty-eight hours—or indeed one may say only about sixteen, making deductions for sleeping and eating. Suppose we put it to the vote. Mr. Vidal is in favour of our remaining ; Clare and Mr. Heriot are indifferent ; so that unless I vote with the ayes we shall get no decision. Very well, then we will consider the motion carried.’

It did not appear to have occurred to anybody to inquire the opinion of Mr. Irvine, who had drifted away aimlessly into the darkness some time before, and had not reappeared. In a few minutes the ladies withdrew, and no sooner were

they out of earshot than Vidal broke forth into impetuous praises of Miss Irvine's beauty.

'My dear Heriot, why didn't you mention her when you were talking about them before dinner? She is far and away the most exquisite creature I ever beheld!'

'Yes, she is a beautiful girl,' said Heriot, rather drily.

'And as good as she is beautiful, I am sure.'

'Oh, well, that would be saying a great deal, wouldn't it? To the best of my belief, she is neither better nor worse than the generality of young ladies who have not been very long out of the schoolroom. No; that is not quite true: she is better than the generality in some respects; for there is a freshness and innocence about her which—'

'Well?' asked Vidal; for Heriot had come to a full stop.

'Which, in the nature of things, can't last much longer—more's the pity. If I were you, Adrian, I wouldn't flirt with her. She doesn't understand the game yet, and why should you be the one to teach it to her?'

Now Vidal had a theory, founded upon experience, that the game of flirtation is one in which no woman, however young, stands in need of an instructor. He did not, however, even inwardly, seek to apply it in the present instance, but contented himself with an energetic disclaimer of the intention attributed to him.

'Surely,' he exclaimed, 'I may be permitted to admire respectfully what no man with eyes in his head could help admiring! And really I don't know why you should take it for granted that Miss Irvine would condescend to flirt with me if I wished her to do so. But I don't wish anything of the kind.'

Heriot smiled. He was quite conscious of the absurdity of his appeal, but he had not found himself able to resist making it. 'How long are you going to be in Switzerland?' he asked, with an abrupt change of subject.

'Well, I thought about a month; but I may stay longer if I find solitude conducive to work. You see, Heriot, I don't quite know yet whether it is in me to write a good novel, and I want to make sure and to give myself every chance. I didn't do my utmost with that last book; I doubt whether I should do my utmost with this one if I were in London, liable to constant interruptions. It is true that the brain is apt to grow sluggish when one has no company to keep one alive;

but whether that disadvantage isn't partly compensated for by—'

'I beg your pardon,' broke in a deprecating voice, 'but can you tell me whether this is the principal inn of the place? I have lost my way, and cannot at this moment recall the name of my hotel. The Soldierhof—or Shoulderhof—or—'

'Try Schweizerhof,' suggested Heriot. 'Your instinct has led you to the right place, Mr. Irvine; and I shall be delighted to show you the way up to your room.'

Perhaps he was not altogether sorry to escape the end of a dissertation to which not even the most devoted of friends could be expected to listen without some degree of boredom.

CHAPTER IV

MISS IRVINE

WHEN Vidal woke on the following morning the sunshine was streaming into his room. Lucerne had been up and about for hours. The church bells were ringing; the steamers were blowing their hoarse whistles; from the quay without came guttural shouts, and from the corridors within the tramp of departing travellers, and the banging of heavy trunks. But Vidal no longer anathematised this unending turmoil. On the contrary, so completely was this young man's judgment at the mercy of a mood that he actually found something cheerful and exhilarating in the signs of surrounding life and movement that were thus borne to him; and so far from stigmatising his fellow-tourists as 'vile,' would, upon the slightest provocation, have been quite willing to shake hands with them all round.

He got up and threw open his window. The deep blue lake was like a mirror in some places, and flecked with passing breezes in others; nearer to the shore every wavelet was a flashing diamond; the sky overhead was unclouded; but up the sides of the distant mountains light mists were curling and vanishing. Evidently there was going to be glorious weather, and Vidal, being in such good-humour, determined that, as a reward for having worked so hard of late, he should have two whole days of idleness and enjoyment—or,

Mrs. Irvine's calculation, sixteen hours, making deductions for food and sleep. Perhaps, even, it would not be necessary to subtract so long a time ; since meals are not generally eaten in solitude, and many people like to sit up late when the nights are fine and the moon at the full.

All this only shows with what alarming rapidity a susceptible man will jump to conclusions ; for assuredly it was neither by himself, nor with Heriot, nor even with Mrs. Irvine, that our young friend looked forward to contemplating the moon. He dressed after a leisurely, dawdling fashion, pausing every now and again to lean out of the window and look down upon the clipped horse-chestnut alley beneath, and upon the passers-by. And so it befell that, during one of these pauses, he became aware of a lady seated upon the low wall beside the lake. This lady wore a dress of white serge, and was sitting sideways, in such a manner as to display one of the neatest boots that ever gladdened the eyes of an appreciative spectator. Unfortunately, she carried a large sunshade, which concealed the upper part of her person ; but, although Vidal had never seen the dress before in his life, and could not have sworn to the boot, he felt no doubt at all as to the identity of the wearer. He remained watching her patiently until a change of posture caused her to raise her sunshade for a moment, and revealed the head of Miss Irvine, surmounted by one of those straw sailor hats which are becoming even to plain women, and, when worn by pretty ones, are simply irresistible.

After that glimpse there was clearly only one thing to be done. Vidal performed the remainder of his toilet with the utmost despatch, and was upon the point of running downstairs and crossing the road, when he was arrested by a most unpleasing spectacle. Taking a last glance out of the window, he perceived that Miss Irvine had altered her position. She now had her back turned towards him, and was leaning over the wall ; while beside her, in a similar attitude, was a tall individual, whose get-up, as far as could be discerned, was that of a modern young Englishman of fashion.

'So much for childlike innocence and ignorance of the wicked ways of men !' was Vidal's hasty and unjust comment upon what he saw. 'I might have known that young ladies don't get up at eight o'clock in the morning for nothing.'

So he threw himself down in his arm-chair, and decided that he wouldn't take a holiday after all. What ! make one

of a party to circumnavigate that weary lake and talk to a tedious old woman, while the daughter was amusing herself with her long-legged admirer? Hardly! No; he would go for a long walk into the country all by himself, and cease to trouble his head about people whom he was most unlikely ever to meet again. But it was not in Vidal's nature to sit and sulk in a corner long, and after a time he began to see that he was behaving very foolishly. Was it to be supposed that Miss Irvine could have reached her present age (she looked about twenty) without having had a single admirer? And because she allowed her admirers to speak to her, did it follow that she reciprocated their admiration or made appointments with them? Again, why should not the gentleman with the long legs be her brother or her cousin? Finally, what the deuce did it matter to him—Vidal—who or what the fellow might be?

Having reached the conclusion that it didn't matter in the least, he went downstairs and sauntered across the road to the horse-chestnut alley, beneath which Miss Irvine and the unknown were still standing. Of course it would never do to interrupt their conversation; but Vidal thought he would just walk slowly past, and she could see him or not, as she pleased.

He duly executed this manœuvre, with the result that Miss Irvine not only saw him, but was evidently pleased into the bargain. She smiled, nodded, and when the young man made as though he would have passed on, stopped him with a gesture.

'Are you taking an early constitutional?' she asked. It struck Vidal that she was rather anxious for the company of a third person.

Her interlocutor, it appeared, did not share this anxiety. 'Well, good-bye, Miss Irvine,' he said. 'I hope we may meet in England before long; and if not—well, perhaps you will let me hear from you.'

He was a broad-shouldered, fresh-complexioned man of five or six and thirty, with a loud, but not disagreeable voice. Miss Irvine shook hands with him, but made no audible reply, and he strode over to the hotel without bestowing a glance upon the new-comer, who, on the other hand, had carefully taken stock of him.

'Is it not a perfect morning?' Miss Irvine began. 'Have you breakfasted yet? and are you going to do anything par-

ticular to-day? My mother has gone off to inspect the bridges; but she told me that if I saw you or Mr. Heriot, I was to let you know that we think of starting at twelve o'clock to make the tour of the lake. She hoped you might be inclined to come with us.'

There was a certain hurry and nervousness in the girl's manner which Vidal did not fail to notice; but he had been too much pleased at hearing of the stranger's imminent departure for England to care whether he was or was not a suitor for Miss Irvine's hand.

'I should enjoy it of all things,' he answered heartily; 'and I am sure Heriot will like to come.' He added, with a disingenuousness of which he ought to have been ashamed, 'The face of your friend who was here just now seems to be familiar to me—and yet I am not sure. His name isn't—isn't Parker, is it?'

'No,' answered Miss Irvine calmly; 'his name isn't Parker.' She raised her eyes, with just the faintest shade of surprise in them, to those of her questioner. She did not exhibit any of the embarrassment which he had half expected, and he felt that it was he who was looking rather foolish.

'Oh!' he murmured confusedly: 'I—I thought perhaps it was.'

'He is a Mr. Wilbraham, whom we met last winter,' Miss Irvine said. 'Do you know him?'

'No; I must have been mistaken. One person is so like another.'

'So papa always says; and perhaps, now that you mention it, Mr. Wilbraham's *is* rather a common type of face. Would you care to walk as far as the bridge with me? I think I had better go and find my mother.'

Vidal made use of no conventional figure of speech when he replied that he should be delighted. Nothing, indeed, could have been more delightful to him than Miss Irvine's society; and the matter-of-course way in which she offered it convinced him that his first impression of her had been correct, and that her beauty was equalled only by her simplicity.

'I am so glad that we are going to stay a day or two here,' she said, after they had proceeded a few yards on their way. 'I suppose we should have been starting now, if we had made up our minds to go straight home. How horrid it would have been!'

'You said last night that you didn't care whether you stayed or not,' remarked Vidal.

She laughed. 'Well, I couldn't tell that it was going to be such a fine day. Besides, all sorts of things may happen to prevent one from enjoying an excursion. Tiresome people may turn up, for instance ; and there is no possibility of escape from them on board a steamer.'

This was most satisfactory. 'Tiresome people' obviously meant Mr. Wilbraham ; and since it seemed to be implied that he had turned up unexpectedly, there was no occasion to harbour any further feeling of malice against the poor man. Vidal's spirits, which had hitherto been a trifle depressed, now fully recovered their tone ; and if his companion did not find him clever and amusing, she must have been singularly insensible to qualities which had made this fortunate fellow a general favourite, from his boyhood up.

So these two passed on through sunlight and shade till they reached the old covered bridge, where Mrs. Irvine, with 'Murray' in her hands and her chin in the air, was laboriously examining the quaint triangular paintings overhead, and endeavouring to decipher the crabbed German characters of the legend which each scene bore, inscribed beneath it.

'Oh, here you are at last, Clare !' she exclaimed. 'And you have brought Mr. Vidal with you, which is such a comfort, because I am sure he understands German better than I do.—Now, Mr. Vidal, will you explain this to me ? It is most interesting, and Murray gives one no sort of help. "Scenes relating to the history of the town," he says, or something of that kind. Just enough to excite one's curiosity without gratifying it, you know.'

'Well, Mrs. Irvine,' answered Vidal, with great presence of mind, 'the fact is that some of the subjects are not *quite*—that is, it is better not to inquire into them too closely.'

'Good gracious me, you don't say so !' exclaimed the good lady. 'I should never have supposed that from the look of them.—Clare, we had better seek out your father and keep him until the boat starts, or he will be sure to wander off somewhere and lose himself. Never mind the pictures : they have no artistic merit—not a bit worth looking at.'

With that she hustled away, carrying off her daughter, who, indeed, had not been looking at the pictures, but at the rushing blue-green waters of the Reuss beneath; and so Vidal got home to breakfast.

The prospect of spending six or seven consecutive hours on board a lake steamer in company which demands a more or less incessant flow of conversation, is one from which the generality of mankind may well shrink appalled. Silence is the prerogative of intimacy ; to acquaintances of recent date you are bound to go on talking ; and unless you are blessed with an exceptionally fertile brain, the result is but too certain. Economise your stock of subjects as you may, it must needs run dry at last ; you search in vain for fresh ones ; then a numbing sense of lassitude steals over you, and finally comes the inevitable moment when Nature asserts herself, and you yawn undisguisedly in the face of your neighbour, whose jaws fly open in ready sympathy. But there are certain persons who are strangers to such dismal experiences, and Adrian Vidal was one of them. Solitude often bored him ; society scarcely ever. He took a real interest, not only in humanity at large, but in almost every individual whom he encountered ; whence, no doubt, arose his great popularity. Like Abou ben Adhem, he might have cried, ‘ Write me as one who loves his fellow-men ;’ and the just system of reciprocity which prevails in all human affairs caused him to be beloved by them in return.

Therefore, neither he nor the lady to whom he devoted himself through the greater part of that spring day found the time long or wished for a change of partners. Miss Irvine, it is true, was not very difficult to get on with ; for she was predisposed in favour of the young author, to whom, shortly after the boat had left the quay, she began to speak of those literary ambitions which he might reasonably be supposed to cherish. She had not her mother’s unflattering vagueness of impression as to Vidal’s past achievements ; she was well aware that he had as yet produced no book, charming or otherwise ; but Heriot had shown her some of his articles, and these she had read with the reverence and admiration for printed matter which belongs to youth.

‘ Do you know,’ she said, ‘ you are the first author I have ever met ? I think if I were a man, I would rather be an author than anything else.’

‘ But it is not necessary to be a man in order to be an author,’ remarked Vidal ; ‘ and I am afraid if the truth were known, most men are only authors—at least, novelists—because they can’t be anything else.’

‘ I don’t think you can mean that,’ said Miss Irvine—and

in fact it is probable that he did not. ‘ You surely would not place Dickens or Thackeray below a successful doctor or lawyer ? ’

‘ No ; but perhaps the rank and file of our calling are rather below the rank and file of others. At all events, that is the common opinion. We are a discredited class, because the immense appetite for fiction causes hundreds of novels to pay their way which have no business to pay their way. Novel-writing is like every other art : it looks so easy and it is so difficult ! Only in other arts the failure is more apparent and more decisive ; so that those who have mistaken their vocation find it out sooner.’

‘ I suppose the great thing is to be very much in earnest over it,’ said the girl thoughtfully.

‘ Exactly ; that is the one indispensable condition. Art won’t accept a divided allegiance. You must give yourself up to her wholly and entirely, or she will never allow you a chance of conquering her.’

‘ Do you think art the only thing worth living for, then ? ’

Mr. Vidal was not prepared to go quite so far as that. He explained that he had been speaking only of a temporary self-surrender, and that he was well aware that life contained possibilities of happiness such as art could never bestow. But it would be hardly fair upon him to record any more of the sentiments to which he gave utterance upon this occasion. When a man is falling more and more deeply in love every minute, he must needs say things which would sound supremely ridiculous to an eavesdropper ; and if Vidal was a little high-flown in his talk, it must be admitted that he met with a good deal of encouragement. Miss Irvine evidently did not find him ridiculous. She ignored his occasional lapses into sentimentality, but seemed willing to admit him to terms of confidential intimacy. She questioned him upon the subject of his family, and told him about her own home in Cornwall, and her six brothers, and the difficulty that there had been in providing that stalwart half-dozen with education and a start in life. ‘ For we are not particularly well off,’ she added simply.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Irvine harangued the patient Heriot ; and Mr. Irvine dozed in the shade ; and the steamer pursued its zigzag course, crossing and recrossing the lake, passing beneath wooded cliffs, and stopping at villages, where cattle were taken on board or disembarked, and where the huge

hotels and *pensions* were as yet untenanted ; until at last Flüelen was reached, and Vidal and Miss Irvine exclaimed, ‘Already !’ in one breath.

Flüelen does not offer many attractions to the casual visitor ; but Vidal long preserved, and perhaps still preserves, a grateful memory of the place. For the hour which had to be spent there before the steamer started on its return voyage proved one of the pleasantest that had fallen to his lot in a life composed largely of pleasant hours. Mr. Irvine expressed his intention of drinking a cup of tea quietly at the inn ; and his wife, after consulting Murray, found that she could keep him company without neglecting her duty. ‘If you want to walk about, Clare,’ she said, ‘I dare say Mr. Heriot or Mr. Vidal will be kind enough to look after you.’

To this appeal Heriot did not see fit to make any response ; and thus the conversation which had begun on board the steamer was continued with even less danger of interruption. By this time Vidal’s subjugation was an accomplished fact, and he knew it and gloried in it. In Miss Irvine he saw, not merely a girl of singular beauty and charm of manner, but far more than that—nothing less, indeed, than the Ideal Woman. He recognised in her the embodiment of all the virtues which are supposed to be especially feminine—purity of mind, charity, sympathy with the afflicted, devotion to her family. It must be confessed that she obtained this recognition upon tolerably easy terms, and Vidal was satisfied to draw inferences where people of more mature years might have demanded tangible proofs ; but perhaps in this he did not differ greatly from other lovers ; nor was it very wonderful that such simple things as a few kind words spoken to a cripple, and some coppers bestowed upon a beggar at the church door, should have served him as a foot upon which to mould a Hercules. Moreover, as it happened, he was not very far wrong in his inductions, and if he could have made inquiries down in Cornwall he would have heard from many mouths a description of Clare Irvine enthusiastic enough to have fulfilled even his high expectations. That there might be nothing wanting in her, she had a touch of melancholy in her manner at times, and a dreamy look in her eyes, which seemed to suggest unsatisfied yearnings. It would not have been consonant with Vidal’s conception of her that she should have been altogether happy, although he had not yet quite reached the length of picturing himself as the one thing lacking to give her life completeness.

After they had wandered through the streets of the little town into the country beyond, and when the bell of the steamer had warned them that it was time to retrace their steps, she asked Vidal to gather a handful of wild crocuses for her ; whereupon he begged for one of the flowers for himself. ‘I should like to have some memento of to-day,’ he said.

The girl glanced at him for a moment with a grave and rather startled look, and then laughed, as if not wishing to make too much of a trifle. ‘Yes, it has been a very pleasant day,’ she answered, but did not give him the flower.

He was rather sorry that he had committed the indiscretion of asking for it when he perceived the effect produced by his request ; for after that she became perceptibly less communicative, and contrived so to arrange matters that he had to listen to Mrs. Irvine’s descriptions of Roman society the whole way back to Lucerne. Disappointing as this was, Vidal submitted to his fate with resignation and good-humour ; and perhaps it was just as well for him that he did so. Talking him over later in the evening, with Heriot, Mrs. Irvine pronounced him to be one of the most delightful and intelligent young men she had ever met, adding that she had a very great mind to prolong their sojourn at Lucerne by another day, as he had entreated her to do.

Heriot looked a little doubtful, and said, ‘Well, if you think it would be wise’—but as Mrs. Irvine did not understand him, and as he hardly liked to be more explicit, the extra day was granted, and an excursion to the Lake of Zug added several more hours of sunshine and bliss to the credit side of Vidal’s account with time.

But on the third day, unhappily, the sunshine vanished. The mountains were shrouded in woolly clouds ; across the grey lake showers came sweeping at intervals, and only one of the party had the hardihood to assert that it would be worth while to go up the Rigi in such weather.

‘You see,’ Vidal said, ‘it isn’t for the sake of the mountain, which is a cockneyfied sort of place at the best of times ; and the view—well, of course there are people who admire a panoramic view, but I really don’t think we need regret the loss of that very much. What I am sure that you would regret most deeply, Mrs. Irvine, would be to have missed seeing the railway. Gradients of one in four—just think of that !’

‘Can’t we sit still and revel in the thought of a gradient

of one in four without getting wet through?' suggested Heriot.

'My dear fellow, it's one of those things that must be seen to be realised. Besides, the railway carriages are covered.'

Mrs. Irvine showed signs of wavering. 'The worst of it is that one is sure to meet such heaps of friends who have done it, and who will pretend that it was the most exciting experience of their lives,' she murmured.

'Exactly so,' said Vidal; 'and after all, the only alternative is to stay indoors all day. For my part, I shouldn't be at all surprised if it were to clear up in the afternoon.'

His representations were strengthened by a timely break in the clouds, and also—somewhat unexpectedly—by Mr. Irvine, whose soul was thirsting after an illuminated missal which he had unearthed in a curiosity shop, and who wished to be removed from temptation. The consequence was that, although the weather became worse instead of improving, the strongest will carried the day, and five travellers in macintoshes and waterproofs disembarked at Weggis that afternoon. All that Heriot had been able to obtain, by way of compromise, was that, since there could be nothing whatever to be gained by ascending to the top of the mountain, they should content themselves with going as far as Kaltbad and returning by the next train. Thus, he said, they might hope to accomplish their purpose with a minimum of misery.

As for Vidal, he saw no question of misery in the matter. It is true that he did not derive any particular satisfaction from standing under the dripping awning of the steamer, nor even from the curious sensation of being dragged in a railway carriage up an incline steeper than the steepest of high roads; but what he thought was that, when once they had reached their destination, Miss Irvine might perhaps be disposed to take a short walk, upon the chance of catching a glimpse of view through the clouds, and he insisted a great deal upon the probability that at a certain height the rain would be replaced by mist.

Both of these expectations were justified by the event. At Kaltbad, where there is a gigantic hotel, empty in the month of May, but crowded later in the season, nothing worse was encountered than a nipping cold air and a dense white fog; and when the three elders had grouped themselves round the stove, expressing their unalterable determination not to

move thence until the train should come to take them down, it required but a very little exercise of diplomacy to carry out the remainder of the programme.

CHAPTER V

IN THE CLOUDS

ALL sorts of extravagant ideas passed through Vidal's head as he walked along the mountain side with the girl whom he loved, and whom he had known for barely three days. Every now and again the mist-wreaths parted, showing them some sombre peak towering high overhead, or a gleam of grey water from beneath ; then they were wrapped once more in a sort of white darkness, through which they could hardly distinguish one another's forms. They seemed so completely alone, so separated from the world and all its conventionalities, that Vidal, upon whom external conditions always possessed a strong influence, felt as if there would be nothing very strange in speaking his heart out and saying, 'I love you.'

But, underlying the impetuosity of his nature, there was ever a vein of common-sense, which had preserved him from the commission of many absurdities before then, and he had more reasons than one for knowing that the utterance of those three words must be preceded by a considerable period of reflection. Therefore he did no more than repeat them many times inwardly, and only said aloud, 'So you are really going away to-morrow ?'

'Yes,' answered the girl, with something like a sigh. 'I am sorry. It is as if we had come to the end of the holidays, though we are going home.'

'It is something to have a home to go to when holiday-time is over,' remarked Vidal.

'And have you no home ? Oh no, I remember you told me that you had rooms in London. That can hardly be like a home, I suppose. You said you had a mother though.'

'Yes ; I am blessed with a mother, and also with a sister. But we are three. I am glad to say that we are always very good friends when we meet ; but it is doubtful whether we should continue to be so if we lived under one roof. So we

don't live under one roof ; and, in default of a home, I have to make the best of Duke Street, St. James's.'

'Well,' said the girl after a short pause, 'I suppose most people must be contented with second bests in this world, and ought to be thankful enough if they get as much.'

'I don't agree with you in the least !' cried Vidal, with some warmth. 'I think there is nothing so fatal to happiness as making up your mind to be contented with something less than what you want.'

'But if you can't get what you want ?—or if you don't quite know what you want ?'

'If you don't know, you are in a bad way, I admit ; but surely it ought not to be very difficult to find out ; and then it depends almost entirely upon yourself, I believe, whether you get it or not. There are very few things, except good health, of which a man can say that it is impossible that he should ever gain them.'

'Ah, a man—perhaps. But a woman is in a very different position. It is not always possible for her to control her destiny ; and even if it were, she might shrink from consulting only her own interests.'

'Are you speaking of yourself ?' asked Vidal abruptly.

Miss Irvine laughed. 'Oh,' she said, 'my destiny is a very uncertain affair as yet, and at any rate I have this advantage over you, that I am quite satisfied with my home. I wonder whether you will ever see it ? Polruth is rather out of the world ; but numbers of people—quite ten families, I should think—come down every summer now for the sea-bathing ; and it is admitted that ours is the finest coast in England in point of scenery.'

'I have been for a long time meditating a tour in Cornwall,' said Vidal, with pardonable mendacity. 'Perhaps I might be able to illustrate my theory of being able to do what I want to do by turning up in your neighbourhood some time in August.'

'Oh, I wish you would !' cried Miss Irvine, displaying more frank cordiality than was quite agreeable to her would-be lover. 'If you came in August, Mr. Heriot would be with us, most likely ; so that we should be able to offer you that additional attraction. Do try to manage it. I wish we could give you a room ; but I am afraid all the boys will be at home then. However, we could easily find tolerable quarters for you in the village.'

She went on talking about Polruth and about Cornish manners and customs with a good deal of animation, hardly allowing Vidal to get in a word edgeways. Evidently she was desirous of avoiding the more serious subject which they had begun to discuss ; and this excited her companion's curiosity, and made him determine to re-introduce it at the earliest opportunity. However, she spared him that trouble by recurring to it herself, after a time. They had reached a point near the Rigi Staffel, and, the veil of mist having lifted for a moment, were looking down upon a motionless sea of cloud, out of which dim mountain-tops rose like islands here and there.

'According to you,' Miss Irvine began abruptly, 'one has only to wish for a thing with sufficient energy, and one is pretty sure to get it. That may be so ; but surely, without being at all heroically unselfish, one must be guided a little by what others wish. One's own happiness ought not to be the sole aim and object of one's life.'

'I don't say that it should ; although, as a matter of fact, happiness, present or future, is exactly what everybody does pursue. Of course, happiness admits of many definitions. Some people, I firmly believe, get it by simply satisfying their appetites ; others find it in doing their duty, or in sacrificing themselves for the benefit of their neighbours.'

'I can't think that any one would sacrifice himself merely because he expected to be the happier for doing so. But perhaps a sacrifice might cease to be a sacrifice if it gave a great deal of pleasure to those whom one cared most about in the world.'

'That would depend upon what it involved, I should say. But the fact is that we are at cross purposes, Miss Irvine. I was speaking generally, whereas you are thinking of some particular instance.'

'No ;—at least, I was thinking of something—but it doesn't signify,' answered the girl, rather incoherently. 'Ought we not to be going back ?'

Vidal looked at his watch, and found that they certainly ought. They had but ten minutes in which to retrace their steps ; and very soon the imprudence of indulging in day-dreams and propounding vague theories while walking through a fog was brought home to him. He did not like to tell Miss Irvine that he had utterly lost his bearings, but when he had

spent a quarter of an hour in hurrying her hither and thither the admission was superfluous.

'Mr. Vidal,' she said calmly, 'have you the slightest idea of where we are?'

'If you insist upon the truth,' answered Vidal, half laughing, 'I must confess that I have not.'

'Then hadn't you better shout until some one comes?'

It really seemed the only thing to be done. There was something rather humiliating in shrieking for assistance, and also in being lost upon a mountain which is traversed by two lines of railway, and sprinkled all over with hotels; but the awkwardness of the predicament that they were in was more apparent to Vidal than to Miss Irvine; besides which, he had just a faint hope of being able to stop the train if he could make their whereabouts known.

This hope died away after he had shouted himself hoarse without eliciting any response, and he was beginning to feel as uncomfortable as he had ever felt in his life, when he was startled by a stentorian bellow, proceeding from some point only a few yards away, and immediately afterwards a figure loomed up through the mist, which proved to be that of a native, who had been sent up from the hotel to search for the wanderers. The train had left some time since, he explained; and as, unfortunately, it was the last one, the '*Herrschaft*' had gone down in it. But he could take them down by some short cuts, and there was a boat from Weggis at seven o'clock, which they could easily catch, if the lady did not mind the walk.

It was only too plain that, whether the lady minded it or not, the walk would have to be undertaken, and Vidal's contrition was so deep and unfeigned that a far less amiable person than Miss Irvine must needs have pardoned him.

'It was not your fault,' she said; 'and I am quite accustomed to rough walking and wet weather. So long as we catch the boat, there will be no harm done.'

Whether she realised the situation in all its bearings, Vidal hardly knew; but, for his own part, he was a good deal vexed, feeling that he had not only let slip the opportunity of saying many things to her which he would have liked to say, but that he had probably put in serious jeopardy the position that he had won in Mrs. Irvine's good graces.

Their guide was hastening downhill at a jog-trot which made conversation all but impossible; and Miss Irvine declined the young man's repeated offers of assistance, declaring that

she was perfectly well able to take care of herself, and begging only that no time might be lost ; but he took advantage, at last, of a short stretch of level ground to turn round and say, ‘I hope your mother will not be very angry with me.’

To which she replied, ‘Oh dear, no ! Why should she be ? She will not even be angry with me. My mother is very good-natured.’

Vidal could but trust that the old lady might prove worthy of the character attributed to her ; but he felt very ill at ease and ashamed of himself ; and when, at length, they reached Weggis, weary, muddy, and wet, it was a great relief to him to find only Heriot waiting for them on the landing-stage.

Mr. and Mrs. Irvine, it appeared, had been persuaded to go on to Lucerne by the last boat, and Heriot was too glad to see the truants back safe and sound to scold either of them ; but Vidal, knowing the man, saw that he was more annoyed than he wished to show, and as soon as they were on board the steamer he took occasion to apologise.

‘I’m awfully sorry to have kept you standing about there in the rain, old man ; but I didn’t do it on purpose, you know.’

‘Oh, the waiting was nothing,’ Heriot said.

‘I didn’t give Miss Irvine that long walk on purpose either, as far as that goes.’

His friend was silent for a minute or two, and then remarked, ‘Well, they are going away to-morrow.’

‘So that I shan’t be able to do it again, do you mean ?’ asked Vidal, laughing.

‘I mean that I am very glad they are going away,’ answered Heriot ; and Vidal did not see fit to press him for an explanation.

CHAPTER VI

‘SI JE VOUS LE DISAIS’

MRS. IRVINE was perhaps less particular or less suspicious than the generality of mothers. At all events, she did not seem to think that Vidal’s heedlessness called for any blame ; but, on the contrary, began to beg his pardon for having run

away and left him in the lurch. ‘Mr. Irvine did want to set out in search of you,’ she said ; ‘but, you know, if I had let him do that I should have had to go and look for him, and then somebody else would have had to look for me, and there would have been no end to it. So I persuaded him to come straight back ; and afterwards I was particularly glad that I had done so, because we met the Skeffingtons at the table-d’hôte—do you happen to know General Skeffington ?—such a nice man !—and he was very encouraging about poor Charley. Charley is my second boy, who has failed for the army, poor fellow ! General Skeffington says he isn’t in the least surprised. I mean, he thinks that all these examinations are great nonsense, and that an officer ought not to be a bookworm. Fortunately, there is still the militia, so that we need not despair.’

Mrs. Irvine had innumerable acquaintances, whom she utilised, or thought that she utilised, to assist her in heating the equally innumerable quantity of irons which she always had in the fire. The smooth things prophesied to her by General Skeffington and the prospects of the unlearned Charley occupied all her conversation until she bade Vidal good-night ; and the young man felt that he had been let off cheaply.

The next morning, at eight o’clock, he was at the station to say good-bye to his new friends. Heriot, intending to break the journey at Bâle, had decided to leave by a later train. It was not without a certain sinking of the heart that our hero followed Miss Irvine, whose travelling bag and cloak he was carrying, across the platform. The three days’ romance was at an end, he thought sadly. Yesterday he had not been far from declaring his love ; to-day it seemed impossible that he could ever have dreamt of doing so insane a thing. For what was he, or could he be, to her but a stranger in whose company a few hours had been spent, more or less agreeably—at best, one whom she might have learnt to like if chance had thrown them together for a longer time ?

They had to part now, like the mere acquaintances that they were. And then he thought how beautiful she was, and how, as a matter of course, others besides himself must be captivated by her beauty ; and something seemed to tell him that she was reserved for a higher destiny than he could offer. So opposite are the influences exercised by a mountain top and a railway station ! As he helped her to arrange her paraphernalia, and mechanically uttered the commonplaces suitable to the occasion, Alfred de Musset’s lines kept ringing in his

head—‘*Si j? vous le disais, pourtant, que je vous aime!*’ Did she understand at all? he wondered. And supposing that she could be made to understand, would she be surprised, or angry, or only amused? At any rate, it was certain that no hint could be conveyed in the midst of all that hurry and bustle. He was obliged to get out of the carriage to make room for Mr. and Mrs. Irvine; and to them, too, some last words had to be spoken. The old gentleman roused himself to say that his clubs were the Athenaeum and the Oxford and Cambridge, and that he hoped Mr.—er—er—Ryder would look him up when he was in London; and then Mrs. Irvine broke in with—

‘Oh, but Mr. Vidal is going to pay Cornwall a visit. Mr. Heriot, do you know that he talks of being in our parts in August?’

‘Oh!’ said Heriot, rather drily.

‘Yes; and I was thinking about what rooms there were in Polruth; and I feel sure that old Mrs. Treweke would be just the person. A most respectable old creature, and would do her very best to make you comfortable—lost both her sons in a mining accident, poor thing! so that one would be glad to do her a good turn; only perhaps you ought to lock the wine up, you know—just as a precaution, that’s all. But I will make a point of writing to you about it. Have you got one of your cards? Duke Street, St. James’s—thank you so much! And you’ll bear in mind that Italian governess, won’t you? Signora Lisetto, or Stiletto, or something like that—however, all particulars can be had on application to me. Good-bye—so glad to have met you!—Good-bye, Mr. Heriot.’

And now there was only time to repeat the same melancholy word to Miss Irvine, and to catch her last smile and nod before the train began to move. Vidal stood looking after it with mournful eyes, and murmuring to himself, ‘*Si je vous le disais, pourtant, que je vous aime, qui suit, brune aux yeux bleus, ce que vous en diriez?*’

He was roused by Heriot’s voice, which sounded a little harshly, saying, ‘Come and sit down somewhere in the shade, Adrian; I want to talk to you.’

‘You say that as if you intended to give me a tremendous rowing,’ remarked Vidal, as he took his friend’s arm. ‘Have I been misbehaving myself?’

‘Ah, that is just what I don’t know,’ answered Heriot; ‘and that is what I want you to tell me,’

But as Vidal only laughed, without replying, the other said no more until they had passed out of the station and had found an unoccupied bench near the lake, when he resumed abruptly, ‘Well, how far has it gone?’

‘I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Oh, pardon me, my dear fellow, I think you do know. You and I understand one another pretty well at this time of day, and I am not going to make any apologies for my impertinence.’

‘Certainly not. But all the same, I *don’t* know what you mean. In one sense—so far as I am concerned, that is—it has gone very far indeed ; about as far as it could go. I don’t mind telling you that ; and, in fact, I should have told you, whether you had asked me or not. In another sense, it hasn’t gone on at all ; it hasn’t begun.’

Heriot stroked his beard and sighed. ‘I hope you won’t go down to Cornwall,’ he said presently.

‘Why not ? Can you give me any good reason why I shouldn’t ? I don’t understand you. Look here, Heriot—you won’t mind my asking, will you ? Have you any—any feeling for her yourself ?’

‘I have such a feeling for her as a middle-aged man, who is dying of angina pectoris, may have for a beautiful girl upon the threshold of life,’ answered Heriot quietly ; ‘and you must remember that it was I who took the responsibility of introducing you to her. As for giving you good reasons for letting a flirtation of three days drop now——’

‘It has not been a flirtation,’ interrupted the younger man eagerly. ‘Believe me or not as you like, she is the only woman whom I have ever loved, and whether I have known her three days or three years is nothing to the purpose.’

‘Well, well. But I can give you the good reasons, nevertheless. To begin with—and, for the matter of that, I suppose we might end with it too ; for it’s painfully conclusive—you are not well enough off to marry.’

‘I have six hundred a year.’

‘That is what I say. You have six hundred a year, and stinginess has never been one of your defects. You know very well that it is all you can do to live upon your income as a bachelor. To bring up a family upon it would be so wildly impossible that I can’t believe you have seriously contemplated such a thing.’

It struck Vidal that this was taking time by the forelock

with a vengeance. ‘I confess that I haven’t given much thought to the family,’ he answered, with a slight laugh; ‘but as for my income, I hope it won’t remain stationary. I have added to it a little already from time to time, and I mean to add to it in a more systematic way now, if I can.’

‘By writing?’

‘Why not? Men have made money by writing before now.’

‘How many men?—and how much money? You know, I am not altogether ignorant of literary matters; I have written a little myself at odd times.’

‘But not novels.’

‘Not novels, certainly; still I know something of the experiences of novelists. It isn’t altogether a question of merit; so I may say, without casting any reflection upon you, that the chances are very much against your ever making a living at that trade.’

‘Yet you recommended it.’

‘As being preferable to none; I know I did. I was sure that you could write what I should consider a good novel; but I can’t answer for the opinion of the public, which pays. All I wish to point out is that the prospect is an uncertain one; and you yourself will admit that much.’

‘I admit that all beginners must be uncertain of success. But, Heriot, doesn’t it occur to you that you are taking a great deal too much for granted? You talk as if winning Miss Irvine’s love would be the easiest thing in the world—as if I had only to throw the handkerchief. It seems to me that you are as far from understanding her as you are from realising that poverty is only a relative evil.’

‘I venture to look upon poverty as a positive evil,’ said Heriot. ‘As for Clare Irvine—well, since we are alone, I will speak plainly and without regard for your blushes. You are very good-looking, my dear Adrian, and you are also clever and amiable; so that a young woman who should fall in love with you could hardly be accused of bad taste. I don’t think it is taking too much for granted to assume that this particular young woman is liable to be attracted by what attracts others, and that is why I say that you are bound to consider consequences. The thing isn’t done yet; just stop and think a little before you do it. And there’s something more that I should like to say to you. I heard yesterday from Mrs. Irvine that Clare has it open to her to make an excellent mar-

riage. It seems that in the course of their wanderings they fell in with a man named Wilbraham, whom I know a little, and who is a thoroughly good fellow in every way. He has the advantage of being rich and well connected, and I suppose no parents can be indifferent to such things. He proposed to Clare when they were at Rome, and although she began by refusing him, she afterwards seemed disposed to change her mind ; and the long and the short of it is that he hasn't yet received his final answer.'

'Oh, is that it ?' said Vidal. 'Now I understand.'

He was thinking of what the girl had said to him the day before, and he shuddered at the idea that she was in danger of throwing away her life, to please a mother whom, in his haste, he set down as greedy and scheming.

Heriot, who could not follow his thoughts, went on :

'You understand the nature of the case now. She is just upon the point of accepting a man who will make the kindest and best of husbands, when, lo and behold ! down drops a good-looking pauper from the clouds and sets to work to unsettle her mind. Don't you think the good-looking pauper would do well to betake himself to Jericho ?'

'I dare say I might think so if I were her father,' answered Vidal ; 'but I am not her father—nor are you. Would you like to see her marry a man whom she doesn't love, because he is rich and may help her brothers on in the world ? For I take it that that is the English of the matter.'

'No,' answered Heriot, 'I shouldn't like that, and I doubt very much whether she would do it either. What I should like her to do would be to love the man. She certainly can't be very far off loving him, or she wouldn't hesitate.'

'I don't see that at all ; but if it is as you say, she will have ceased to hesitate before I can meet her again. So that I am powerless to do her any harm—or good. If only I had known yesterday as much as I know now !'

'What would you have done ?'

'I should have told her that I loved her. She would have refused me, without any doubt ; but it is just possible that my speaking might, as you say, have "unsettled her mind ;" and that would have been something.'

Heriot clasped his hands behind his head, stared up at the sky, and whistled a tune.

'Why do you do that ?' asked Vidal irritably.

‘To keep myself from being so rude as to say what I think of you.’

Vidal laughed. ‘Now, Heriot, that’s humbug. The sort of generosity which you ask of me would be no generosity at all. It is quite comprehensible that you shouldn’t wish me to marry Miss Irvine——’

‘I don’t see how you can marry her.’

‘Well, let us put things at the worst, and say that I can’t. Then, according to you, I ought to stand aside and allow some other man to make her happy. I don’t know whether I should be capable of such magnanimity if the case were to arise—I hope I should. But the case has not arisen ; because I happen to know that this man Wilbraham cannot make her happy.’

‘How do you know anything about it ?’

‘From a few words that she let fall yesterday. I didn’t understand her at the time, but I do now ; and I tell you that if she gives way, it will be simply and solely because that infernal old mother of hers has persuaded her that it is her duty to sacrifice herself for her family ’

The young man started to his feet as he spoke, strode away for a few yards, then came back and threw himself violently down upon the bench again. ‘I wish to Heaven you hadn’t told me of this, now that it is too late !’ he exclaimed.

Heriot smiled. The truth was, that he had seen his friend in love before, and was not greatly moved by this display of agitation. ‘You are quite mistaken,’ he said quietly. ‘Poor Mrs. Irvine doesn’t deserve abuse. Like other mothers, she would be very much pleased if her daughter made a brilliant match ; but she is not worldly or grasping, and Clare is as free to choose for herself as any girl can be. Hitherto she has not been embarrassed by a large field of choice. She has lived all her life down in the country, and this season at Rome has given her her first sight of the outer world. I wish she could have fancied Wilbraham ; but, from what you say, I fear there is very little chance for him. It is a pity.’

‘Do you really think that?’ asked Vidal eagerly. ‘Do you think she will refuse him ?’

‘I don’t think she would have spoken to you upon the subject if she had meant to accept him. But, setting him aside, I do wish, Adrian, both for your sake and for hers,

that you would try to get over this fancy. You and she are not suited to one another ; but I won't dwell on that point, because, of course, you wouldn't believe me. You will acknowledge, though, that, from a common-sense point of view, it would be a great deal better if you were not to meet again. You have no business to make love to her unless you see some prospect of being able to marry her ; and you can't ask her to starve with you upon six hundred a year. Dive into the mountains and write novels, and forget that there is such a person as Clare Irvine.'

'I fully intend to dive into the mountains and work like a nigger,' answered Vidal, who had recovered his good-humour ; 'but as for forgetting her, that is what I shall never do to the last day of my life.'

Heriot, who had more faith in his friend's powers of oblivion than he thought it prudent to express, made no reply, and the subject was allowed to drop.

On the following day Vidal carried his hopes and anxieties up to Engelberg, there to labour and meditate until the wished-for time of his return to England should come. The repose and silence of that high-lying region, then just awaking out of its long winter's sleep, did him but little good ; and, although he conscientiously worked a certain number of hours every day, there always remained a certain balance of time upon his hands, during which the want of companionship weighed heavily upon him. If anything could have intensified his love for Clare Irvine, it would have been the knowledge that he had a rival. During his rambles over rocky heights and slopes, where thousands of wild flowers were springing up between the patches of half-melted snow, he thought of her and of her only ; he pictured her to himself yielding to the solicitations of inconsiderate parents and of a too unselfish nature ; he was consumed with a feverish longing to hurry home after her, and hear the worst.

Nevertheless, he stuck to his resolution, and remained where he was, taking no small credit to himself for his strength of purpose in so doing. For, indeed, he believed himself to be somewhat remarkable for strength of purpose. He had been quite sincere, and had imagined that he was speaking from experience, when he laid down the proposition that a man has only himself to blame if he does not obtain the object of his desires. He had pretty generally got what he had wanted, and had not looked as closely as he might have done

into the causes which had led to that happy result. As a fact, moral strength did not happen to be his most striking quality. Sanguine, easily elated, and easily depressed, he stood in constant need of sympathy, and was not one who could bear many failures or hold out for an indefinite time against difficulties. Yet (as Heriot had long ago found out) he was capable of distinguishing himself far above his fellows. Granted a first success, he might make himself heard of in the world. The few steps which he had already taken on the road towards fame had been tolerably long steps for a beginner. His essays, contributed to various reviews and magazines, and dealing chiefly with such aspects of modern life as lie upon the surface, had attracted a good deal of notice. They had been bright, clever, excellently worded, and had conveyed the idea that their writer possessed a wider and more profound acquaintance with his subjects than was actually the case. Now he had written a novel, to which he had given the name of ‘Satiety,’ and in which he had satirised what he, oddly enough, fancied to be the prevailing characteristic of his generation. Of this work he secretly—perhaps unconsciously—expected great things. He had spoken, and even thought, disparagingly of it ; but he hardly anticipated a disparaging verdict from the press or the public. And if it should prove—as why should it not?—to be the passport to that Tom Tiddler’s ground in which successful novelists are popularly supposed to disport themselves, might not marriage be among the good things which it would bring within the reach of its talented author?

As he walked among those lonely heights his love grew stronger and deeper. Hitherto he had lacked an object in life ; now he had found one. In Clare he recognised at once his inspiration and his reward. Upon more mature reflection he had admitted to himself the justice of much that Heriot had urged ; but he resolved that, whether he might find it his duty to avoid Miss Irvine for a time or not, he would approach her as soon as he had the right to do so, and that for that end he would labour and live. The only deplorable part of the business was that it should be complicated with a Wilbraham.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE DISCOURAGEMENT

ONE fine hot morning in the beginning of July Mr. Heriot left his house and walked slowly down Brook Street, carrying his stick under his arm and stooping slightly, as his habit was. The fashionable world was hardly out of bed yet, for the clocks had only just struck ten ; but many of Heriot's acquaintances were already up and abroad, and he had not proceeded far on his way before he was accosted by some of these. A curate, hurrying along with shuffling ecclesiastical gait, caught sight of him and crossed the road, exclaiming, ‘ You’re the very man I wanted to meet ! ’ After which there was a brief colloquy, and Heriot’s finger and thumb went into his waistcoat pocket, and a transfer of coin took place. In Bond Street, further on, some of the tradespeople, who were standing in their doorways, wished him good morning, and hoped he was keeping pretty well this beautiful weather. For London is not quite the unneighbourly city that it is often represented as being, and those who spend a little money and take a little interest in the parishes wherein they dwell soon discover that the metropolis is rather a collection of small towns than one immense one. Heriot had plenty of money, which he distributed freely and unostentatiously among those who had none ; so that his kindly, ugly face was tolerably well known in the streets which lay between his house and his club.

‘ Mornin’, sir. Ain’t seen you this three weeks,’ said the crossing-sweeper in Piccadilly. ‘ Bin porely agin, sir ?

But Heriot, as he produced the expected sixpence, said ‘ No,’ he had only been down in the country ; and so passed on to Duke Street, where he was informed that Mr. Vidal was at home and at breakfast.

Vidal greeted his friend with even more warmth than usual. ‘ My dear old chap, how delighted I am to see you ! What the deuce do you mean by going out of town the very day that I return ? Sit down, and they’ll bring you some hot coffee in a minute.’

‘ Thanks, I have breakfasted,’ answered Heriot ; ‘ but I’ll smoke a cigarette with you if you’ll allow me. Well, and what is your news ? ’

Vidal made a gesture of profound discouragement. ‘My news! Why, you must know already what my news is likely to be. I suppose you have seen the papers?’

‘I have been staying in a house where they don’t take in many papers,’ answered Heriot, conscious of an unflattering ignorance upon a subject which ought to have engrossed him more deeply; ‘but I saw some very favourable notices of your book before I left London.’

‘Oh, some of them were civil enough; some of them always are, I take it. But the people whose praise is worth having won’t hear of me at any price. They’ve found me out, my dear fellow, they’ve discovered the nakedness of the land, as I knew they would. Just look at that!’

And he tossed a copy of the *Monday Review* across the table to Heriot, who began to read aloud the article to which his attention was directed.

‘It is not as often as we could wish that we are able to congratulate the writers of novels upon having selected a thoroughly appropriate title for their works, and we are the more ready to accord this praise to the author of “Satiety,” since it is very nearly the only word of praise that we have it in our power to bestow upon him. If ever three volumes were calculated to produce upon the mind of the reader that sensation of which the heading of each page appears to be intended as a dismal warning——’

At this point Heriot thought he wouldn’t read aloud any more, and finished the article in silence; while Vidal, who had thrown himself into an arm-chair, smoked and stared up at the ceiling.

After a longish pause the younger man said, ‘There are lots of others there at your elbow. You had better look through them, and then tell me honestly whether you still think I have a chance of doing any good at this trade.’

Heriot obeyed, and, after perusing a dozen or so of critiques, long and short, exclaimed, ‘Why, my dear boy, nearly all of them are complimentary, and some are positively fulsome. Here’s the *Society Newsman* says——’

‘I don’t care two straws what the *Society Newsman* says,’ interrupted Vidal; ‘and it doesn’t give me the smallest satisfaction to be praised for qualities which I don’t possess.’

‘The *Discriminator*, then—since you won’t be contented with anything less than a high-class journal—the *Discriminator* pats you on the back in the most friendly way, and thinks

that "this is in many respects the most remarkable novel of the year. The characters are not only drawn with rare skill—that of Lady Tatterville, the selfish and cynical old woman of the world, would have done no discredit to Thackeray—but behave themselves under all circumstances as such characters would behave themselves in real life. Mr. Vidal knows what he is writing about, and gives us a sketch of modern society, in certain of its developments, which we must admit to be substantially accurate; although we may doubt whether he is justified in his conclusion that the men and women of our day are less capable of being roused to enthusiasm than their predecessors. We wonder, for instance, what he would say to the crowds of fashionable ladies who thronged to hear Messrs. Moody and Sankey not many years ago, or to the considerable number of men who brave ridicule at the present time by wearing a scrap of blue ribbon in their button-holes. We should like Mr. Vidal to think out these and similar manifestations before he writes his next novel.

The story upon which he hangs his brilliant digressions is, it is true, of the slenderest kind, and seems to us to be wanting in movement throughout; but——”

‘Ah, there it is, you see,’ interpolated Vidal.

‘Well, but he goes on to say that, if the story lacks this, it has abundance of that and t’other, and winds up by prophesying that you will leave your mark upon the literature of the era. Isn’t that good enough for you?’

‘I must say,’ remarked Vidal, after smoking for some minutes in silence, ‘that I like the *Discriminator*. I think it’s honest, you know. One may not always agree with its views; but one feels that it is written by men who are doing their best to be fair, and who don’t scamp their work. When they review a novel they read it, and read it carefully too—which is more than can be said for some of their contemporaries.’

‘It is no doubt an excellent paper,’ agreed Heriot, without the shadow of a smile. ‘The *Monday Review* has also its merits; but it is too superficial, and it labours under the disadvantage of being somewhat celebrated for its smart writing. Imagine the position of an unlucky paper which has to keep up that reputation when opportunities for smartness are so often wanting. I think you ought to be more sorry for the poor *Monday Reviewer* than angry with him. What could be more pathetic than this? “If ‘Satiety’ were as preposterous

in plot, as silly in dialogue, or as ungrammatical in style as many of the novels which our duty compels us to peruse, we could feel relatively grateful to Mr. Vidal, since it is just possible that our labours might then have been lightened by an occasional laugh. But it is none of these things. It is only dull ; only vapid ; only wanting in every single quality that goes to make a readable novel." Can't you see the wretched man rubbing his head in despair ? "Hang it all ! I *must* be smart ; I *must* maintain the character of the paper ; I *must* amuse the public ; and here's this pestilent fellow won't give one half a chance ! No words used out of their proper sense—no confused metaphors—no pea-green sunsets—no nothing!" And then he very naturally turns upon you in his exasperation, and declares that "it is not too much to say that in the course of a very long experience of novels we have come across none so uninterruptedly tedious as 'Satiety.'" "A very long experience, too," poor fellow ! Don't you see that if he has been doing nothing but review novels all his life, he can't be capable of any very ambitious literary work ? And why should you allow yourself to be cast down because a man of such low intellectual calibre fails to appreciate you ?"

"I am quite well aware that you are laughing at me, Heriot," said Vidal ; 'but there is some truth in what you say, for all that. The unfortunate part of it is that critics influence the public—at least, I suppose they do. I wish you would tell me what you yourself thought of the book.'

Heriot hesitated for a moment. 'I read it with a great deal of pleasure,' he said at length ; 'but I can't honestly say that it struck me as being a good novel. You know as well as I do what its defects are ; and I should say that you could very easily avoid them next time. If I were you, I wouldn't be above learning by experience ; and I think I should be very well satisfied with such success as the book has had.'

'It has had no success,' answered Vidal gloomily. 'It doesn't sell.'

'H'm ! That is a good deal worse than adverse criticism.'

'Well, yes, I am afraid it is. I hoped to make a living by my pen ; but now—I don't know. Do you think I have it in me, Heriot ? '

Heriot looked distressed. 'I think you have it in you to write a much better novel than "Satiety,"' he answered. 'More than that I can't venture to say. I can only repeat what I told you at Lucerne.'

'Ah, yes !' sighed the young man. 'Sometimes I wish I had never gone to Lucerne ; and yet—— Come, Heriot, put me out of my pain, and let us get it over. You know what I have been dying to ask you all this time.'

'I hoped you had got over that,' Heriot said.

'Well, I haven't got over it. I shall never get over it,' returned the other impatiently. 'For Heaven's sake, speak out, man. She has accepted him, I suppose ?'

'No ; she has refused him, I am sorry to say. But, my dear Adrian, what difference does that make ?'

Vidal's reply was to start out of the arm-chair in which he had been reclining, and to fling Heriot's hat up to the ceiling —his own not being available.

'Difference !' he exclaimed. 'The difference between life and death, that's all ! So long as I have something to live for, and ever so small a particle of hope to cling to, I can work and do my best. I don't think I could have begun all over again and changed my style of writing, only to get a little praise from the *Monday Review*. So she refused him, eh ? Did she give any reason ?'

'Really I don't know,' answered Heriot, with a vexed laugh. 'I presume she did, but I don't think it likely that she named your existence as the reason. All that I have heard about it was in a letter from Mrs. Irvine, who is already resigned to the loss of Wilbraham, and feels confident that somebody equally eligible will turn up. You are not equally eligible, and I do hope and trust that you will have the decency to refrain from turning up.'

The young man was silent for a minute or two, and then said with sudden vehemence, 'Heriot, I want to see her !'

'I dare say you do ; but it is your duty to put a curb upon your desires. At least, don't go down to Polruth this summer. In another twelvemonth you will probably know something more definite as to your future income.'

'And in the meantime ?'

'In the meantime there is of course the chance of her marrying somebody else. It seems to me that you will have to risk that.'

'Well—I'll try,' said Vidal, with something of an effort. 'I won't make any promise, because I might not be able to keep it ; but I admit that I should have no right to propose to her now ; and so, no doubt, the most prudent course is to

avoid her. You are horridly unsympathetic, do you know, Heriot.'

'No ; only I have a difficulty in believing that a man can lose his heart irrevocably in these days. However, you shall have all my sympathy so long as you continue to exercise a little self-denial.'

'It isn't a little ; it's a very great deal. You must write to me when you are down there, and tell me all about her—*everything*, mind, whether you think I shall like it or not.'

Vidal's buoyant spirits began to rise as soon as he was alone. A great weight had been lifted off his mind by the news of Mr. Wilbraham's final rejection, and the failure of his book no longer seemed to him an irretrievable calamity. Remembering how many famous authors have had to force their way through preliminary neglect and ridicule, he felt a little ashamed of his faint-heartedness. After all, as Heriot had said, it would be easy—possible, at all events—to correct in a second work the mistakes which had proved fatal to the first. The essential thing was to find out what the public really liked ; a point upon which he had hitherto hardly bestowed enough attention perhaps.

That same evening he happened to be at a large dinner party in company with a journalist of repute and a popular novelist. To them he determined to address himself for the required information, and after the ladies had left the dining-room he sat down beside the journalist, and put the question to him point-blank. 'What do you think that the novel-reading public really likes ?'

The journalist, who was a big, burly man, with blunt manners, replied, 'That's rather a puzzler. Incident—humour—pathos—development of character—I can't say exactly. What's one man's meat is another man's poison, you know. But I can tell you what nobody likes, and that's being preached at. Take my advice, Mr. Vidal, and leave sermons to the parsons, whose business it is to produce them. What you want to do is to amuse people, and you'll never do that by tying a string of essays together and calling it a novel.'

'I dare say you are quite right,' said Vidal meekly ; 'but I didn't so much want to be told what to avoid as what to seek.'

'Well, if you ask me, I should recommend you to write a sensation novel. In fashion or out of fashion, they always pay and always go down with the public. Give it 'em hot

and strong, Mr. Vidal—battle, murder, and sudden death—and see if they don't swallow it as I swallow this glass of claret. Devilish good claret it is, too!'

Apparently this was not a person of refined taste. Vidal now betook himself to the author, who at once began to talk to him about 'Satiety,' and was exceedingly polite and encouraging, as men who have reached the top of the hill commonly are to those who are still struggling up the ascent. On being inquired of as to what the novel-reading public really liked, he answered confidentially, 'Well, between you and me, the novel-reading public means the women. If we don't succeed in pleasing them, we are nowhere.'

'And what do they like?' Vidal pursued.

'Ask them,' replied the other, with a laugh, and turned away to speak to someone else.

Vidal thought he might do worse than act upon this hint. In the drawing-room he approached his hostess, a lively little old lady who had once been a beauty, and begged her to tell him who was her favourite novelist. Without any hesitation she named the one who was present, thereby surprising her questioner a little.

'I admire his writing immensely,' said the latter. 'His descriptions of scenery are inimitable, and he is never tedious; but—'

'Ah,' interrupted the old lady, 'that isn't what I mean. His books charm me because there is so much love-making in them. There is nothing so delightful to read about as love-making—of course I mean the English variety, not the French. Love is the one subject that interests us all. Some of us like to read about it because we know nothing of it at first hand; others because it brings back to us the happiest days of our lives. If any woman is bored by love scenes, so much the worse for her!'

'But there is some love-making in all novels,' objected Vidal.

'I prefer the novels in which there is very little else,' said the old lady.

The next person to whom the inquirer applied was a young married woman. Her reply to his first question was identical with that of her senior; but she was rather more concise and explicit in her reasons. 'He understands us,' she said, 'he knows how we feel. Most of you don't.'

After this, Vidal met with various responses, none of

which helped him very much towards a conclusion. One lady, rather maliciously, gave her verdict in favour of Mr. So-and-so, ‘because his novels are always in such nice big print ;’ another declared for a writer of her own sex, ‘because she is so delightfully improper ;’ not one of them had the presence of mind to answer boldly ‘*You.*’ But perhaps that was partly because not one of them had been able to read his book.

When Vidal went away, he betook himself to the smoking-room of his club, and sitting down in a corner, tried to sift something serviceable out of the mass of advice and information which he had received during the day. The effort was not attended with much more success than such efforts generally meet with ; for though teachableness is an excellent quality, it can do but little for its possessor in the absence of adequate teachers, and no one had taken the trouble to point out to Vidal exactly in what way he was to set about improving his style. The whole, when summed up, seemed to mean that, if he wanted his books to sell, he must give them a little more of human interest ; which, to be sure, he might have discovered without consulting such a number of persons. However, he had unconsciously made one valuable acquisition, in the shape of a considerable increase of humility ; so that his investigations had not been quite so fruitless as he supposed.

That month of July remained long memorable to Vidal as having brought him the first persistent attack of low spirits with which he had been afflicted in his life. He employed the customary remedies in vain. Of balls, dinners, and other entertainments he had as many as he could desire ; for if he had not succeeded in earning popularity as a writer, he had long since achieved it as an individual ; but the relaxations of society only left him dull, dissatisfied, and weary of life. These alarming symptoms he naturally set down to grief at his separation from Clare Irvine ; but what he was in reality suffering from was a loss of self-confidence. He was no longer able to write with ease ; he was hampered by a constant dread of boring his readers, and he would have given up writing altogether for a time, had he not felt that time was of so much importance. Once he went down to Brighton for a few days on a dutiful visit to his mother, who lived there, and returned more depressed than ever.

Mrs. Vidal, a well-preserved widow, whose tastes were more expensive than her means were large, had a standing grievance against her two children in that they had been left

independent of her, and had thus deprived her of an income to which she considered herself to be entitled. Her son had never lived with her since he had attained his majority, and her daughter was in the habit of seeking solace for an adventurous spirit in distant travel; so that she would perhaps have had some right to esteem herself neglected by them, had she not, as a fact, found her own society and that of her friends in Brighton a great deal more congenial than theirs. Adrian, who was of an affectionate nature, had been repelled in his earliest boyhood by her icy coldness, and now always treated her with the distant courtesy which she preferred.

'People tell me that you have written a clever novel,' she said on the afternoon of his arrival. 'I seldom read novels, but I have made a point of ordering yours from the library. Have you made much money by it?'

'Not very much,' Adrian confessed.

'No; I should not think that you would ever earn much money at anything,' his mother observed dispassionately. 'And yet you must be in need of money, I suppose. If I were in your place, I should think seriously of making a good marriage. No doubt you meet many rich people in London—City people, perhaps, with daughters. It is a pity not to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves.'

'I don't think I should care about going in for that sort of thing,' said Adrian, in a tone which implied that he did not wish to discuss the question further.

'What sort of thing? Marriage in general?'

'No; only marriage as a financial speculation. Rather than come to that, I would—'

'Marry somebody's lady's-maid?' suggested Mrs. Vidal, who had never forgotten the unfortunate episode in her son's past life which has already been alluded to. 'Well, there is no accounting for tastes, and you are not likely to be influenced by mine. I only hope you may find your literary earnings sufficient to support you and your wife, when you decide upon taking one—as of course you will do, one of these days.'

It may have been accident or it may have been the dawning of a suspicion that caused Mrs. Vidal to recur more than once during Adrian's visit to the topic of his possible marriage. 'You will never be much better off than you are now,' she said; 'for the little that I have will be divided between you and Georgina, and even that little may not

come to you for a considerable number of years. By far your best plan would be to marry money while you still have good looks and a certain vague reputation for talent. Heiresses, I suppose, expect some equivalent for their fortunes, and perhaps it would hardly be wise to count upon either of your special advantages increasing with age.'

Such speeches as this did not tend to raise poor Vidal's drooping spirits. His mother's bland malignity would have affected him less at any other time ; but just now it came upon him like the proverbial last straw. Neither she nor anyone else seemed to have the smallest belief in his future ; and the worst of it was that that future could never, in the nature of things, be anything but uncertain. Even supposing that his next novel should have the good fortune to please the world, would that bring him any nearer to the settled income which fathers-in-law usually make a *sine quâ non* ?

He went back to London, and allowed despair to get the upper hand of him. By degrees he began to admit that Clare Irvine was not for him ; for patient waiting was not among his capacities. Yet, the more he became convinced that his dream must be abandoned, the more he longed to break his half-promise to Heriot and run down to Polruth for a day or two. He dallied with this temptation until it assumed a definite shape. It would be so easy and so innocent to make Cornwall the scene of his summer holiday ! He would scrupulously avoid lingering on the north coast ; but from Falmouth or Penzance he might slip over to Polruth, put up at the village inn, and let nobody know that he was there. Only to see her would be enough. And if he did call once, utter a few commonplaces, and bid her a silent farewell, who could possibly be the worse for it ? Heriot's objections were grounded upon a supposition which only the most outrageous vanity could accept, and Heriot himself could hardly have the cruelty to forbid one brief afternoon call.

And while he was thus educating his conscience, a letter reached him which silenced that troublesome inner voice in a most effectual and satisfactory manner. The moment that Vidal caught sight of the envelope on his breakfast-table, and noted its hurriedly scrawled address, he guessed who his correspondent must be : and when he tore it open and saw that it was dated 'Cardrew, Polruth,' he invoked a fervent blessing upon the head of Mrs. Irvine.

That impulsive lady wrote very much as she spoke.

'Dear Mr. Vidal,—I told you I would let you know about Mrs. Treweeke's lodgings, and you see I have not forgotten, although I have been very busy ever since our return, so many things requiring attention, and the boys being all at home, which always keeps one in a state of bustle, besides other matters which have worried me a good deal ; but of course one must expect worries in this world.

'About Mrs. Treweeke. I was only waiting until we got Mr. Heriot down here—and now he has been with us three days, and is looking so much better that it is quite a pleasure—so I went at once to see her, and she says she is sure she can make you comfortable. Two sitting-rooms and bedroom, two guineas a week—more than she ought to ask, I think ; still one must not be hard upon them, poor souls, with such a short season, and all the trouble that there has been about the fishing this year ; and I am sorry I said that to you about the wine, because I am certain she is as honest as the day, and her feelings might be hurt, so perhaps after all you had better not.

'Now do, pray, think of it. We should all be so very glad to see you again, and Mr. Irvine wishes me particularly to say how sorry he is that we have no spare room just now. Most lovely scenery, and plenty of fishing and lawn tennis ; and of course, if you stay long enough, there will be the shooting. Please excuse haste, and with our kindest regards,

'Believe me, very sincerely yours,
ELIZABETH IRVINE.

'I forgot to say about that Italian governess—don't *on any account* recommend her. She has turned out to be a most disreputable person, and the ten pounds that I lent her I never expect to see again. Such a mercy that nobody had engaged her before I discovered the truth !'

There was no holding out against that. Vidal did not even attempt to do so, but despatched a grateful reply to Mrs. Irvine, and hurried off to buy a Bradshaw forthwith.

CHAPTER VIII

CARDREW

CHANCE, which plays a considerable part in the lives of most people, is responsible for all the works and ways of a few. Chance took Mr. Irvine to Cornwall on his wedding trip, some five-and-twenty years before the opening of the present narrative ; chance led him to Polruth ; the chance of his wife's having caught a cold in her head kept him for two days in that unfrequented fishing hamlet ; and chance caused him to walk up to the old grey house called Cardrew, which stands just beneath the brow of the hills above the village. Cardrew had been many years for sale, and its appearance at that time was hardly calculated to attract purchasers, its garden being an overgrown wilderness, its windows for the most part broken, and every fence and gate about it rotting away from neglect and age. But Mr. Irvine, who possessed a comfortable fortune and no home, happened to have his pockets stuffed full of house-agents' lists, and was anticipating, with the misery of an undecided man, a long period of house-hunting. Here was a house to be sold—a solid, well-built, roomy house, with a sufficiency of land about it, a healthy position, and an admirable prospect. What a deal of worry might be saved by securing it and making it habitable ! He consulted his wife, and had the happiness to find that her views coincided with his own. There was certainly no reason why they should establish themselves in Cornwall, with which county they had no family connection ; but, on the other hand, there was no particular reason why they should not. So the old place was bought for a mere song, and, the necessary repairs having been completed, Mr. and Mrs. Irvine took possession.

There they settled down and multiplied, as the years went on, with satisfaction to themselves and to those who dwelt around them. The neighbours, high and low—there were not a great many of either class—soon became attracted to this simple couple, and freely forgave them for not having been born and bred in the duchy. Mrs. Irvine, active, restless, and profoundly interested in local affairs, while keeping open her many lines of communication with the outer world, was in

more ways than one a godsend to the parish. Her blunders, it is true, were many and frequent, but they were very seldom harmful ; and though some people might occasionally find her a bore, no one had ever been heard to accuse her of selfishness or ill-nature. As for her husband, he was liked, as most of us learn to like the inanimate objects upon which our eyes rest every day. His long hair, his devious gait, and somewhat vacant smile became familiar to Polruth, and would, if they had disappeared, have been missed almost as much as the yew tree in the churchyard or Daniel Chenoweth's old grey mare. In due time his appointment as a magistrate added a touch of dignity to his harmless, desultory existence ; but he was seldom seen two miles away from home, except when the news of an impending sale took him up to London, whence he would return laden with spoils in the shape of antiquities or additions to what was fast becoming one of the finest numismatic collections in the West of England.

When six boys and a girl had to be fed, clothed, and educated, the acquisition of these ancient coins entailed a rather larger outlay of modern ones than was quite convenient; but living at Polruth is very cheap, and although the Irvines were sometimes obliged to consider expense, they could not be said to have ever really felt the pinch of poverty. The boys grew up into young men with that amazing rapidity which is common to the human race, but which is perhaps more noticeable in quiet neighbourhoods than in cities. The girl, as we have seen, developed into a singularly beautiful young woman, and was not so conscious of the fact as she might have been if anyone or anything, except her looking-glass, had informed her of it.

But she did not consult her glass more often than was necessary for the purposes of the toilet, and in the immediate vicinity of Polruth there dwelt no young man of her own rank. Her occupations, after she had been released from the authority of her governess, were so few that she would have found time hang heavily on her hands had she not been bred to the enjoyment of still life. Her amusements were for the most part such as her brothers could join in ; and her knowledge of the world was gleaned solely from what they told her, and from books, of which she was an eager and untrammeled devourer.

Thus it came to pass that Anglo-Roman society was astounded, one winter, by the appearance in its midst of that rare phenomenon, a totally un-selfconscious beauty. That she

did not receive at least a dozen offers during the three months which she spent with her parents on the banks of the Tiber, was probably due to the circumstance that she was at once monopolised by Mr. Wilbraham ; to which cause may also be assigned her willingness to leave scenes which, to her inexperienced eyes, far surpassed all that had ever been said or written about them. For she did not wish to marry this man. Nature was beginning to awaken in her ; in a vague, dreamy way she realised the possibilities of life and love, and felt within herself a capacity for happiness such as she knew of only by hearsay. Carriages, diamonds, and the other adjuncts of wealth tempted her very little, nor did it occur to her to desire the love of a man who could give her these pleasant things. Yet Mr. Wilbraham, viewed in the abstract, was very desirable. He had large estates, he had powerful connections, and he was more than usually pleasing in person and manners. Such a highly favoured individual is not to be rejected without reasons, and reasons were precisely what Clare could not give for rejecting him. When Mrs. Irvine, with some natural impatience, asked her what she would have, she could only reply that she didn't know ; and when her suitor roundly declared that he would not take 'No' for an answer, she thought of all that he could do for the boys, and hesitated. Like many other young persons, she was subject to fits of melancholy which nothing in her circumstances warranted. It seemed to her that hers was a purposeless life, and that if she could promote the happiness of others by marrying a man whom she really did not dislike, it would perhaps be foolish, as well as selfish, to draw back because of some undefined prospect which she feared to lose. Wilbraham's arrival at Lucerne found her still wavering ; but no sooner had she reached home than she wrote him a refusal so decisive that he made no further attempt to move her. From this it might seem as though the prospect above referred to had ceased to be undefined ; but such was by no means Clare's belief. She was a good deal ashamed of herself, and felt that her eldest brother, Jack, was not far wrong when he called her an 'awful dufier' for throwing such a chance away.

'Just think of the sport we might have had !' he exclaimed regretfully. 'Do you know that he has a deer forest and a three-hundred ton yacht, and that they made bigger bags at his place in Norfolk last winter than on any other estate in England ? It strikes me that you are too ambitious, Clare.'

The last member of the Royal Family is disposed of now, you know ; and the supply of unmarried dukes is lamentably deficient.'

The girl was really more hurt by this good-humoured chaff than she cared to show. No one treated her with unkindness; but it was clear enough that everyone thought her rather silly, and she was conscious that she had been to blame in taking so long a time to make up her mind. Heriot's arrival was a comfort to her. He and she had always been friends ; she knew instinctively that he understood her, and this knowledge was not the less soothing because she had some difficulty in understanding herself. Sometimes she was inclined to ask him whether he thought she had done wrong ; but now that the thing was over, and the decision irrevocable, there seemed to be little use in talking about it ; so she kept her misgivings to herself, and carried them out to a certain grassy headland overlooking Polruth Bay, where she was wont to dream away some part of the long summer days.

One afternoon in the beginning of August she was sitting there upon the short, sweet-smelling herbage, her hands clasped round her knees, and her eyes fixed upon the golden mists which obscured the horizon. Some three or four hundred feet beneath her the Atlantic rollers awoke the echoes of the caves; on her right hand Polruth, a jumble of slate roofs, and steep, narrow streets, overtopped its diminutive harbour, and to the right of that again a great semi-circle of white sand swept away to the promontory which formed the northern horn of the bay. Clare did not heed this familiar prospect, nor hear the shouts that arose from the returning fishing-boats. For a long time she had remained without changing her attitude, and from the intensity of her gaze it might almost have seemed as though, like Sister Anne, she expected to see somebody coming to her out of that mysterious haze which bounded the world.

Somebody was indeed coming, though from a less improbable direction. A young man who had just arrived from London, and had taken up his quarters at Mrs. Treweeke's lodgings, had strolled out to get a breath of fresh air before dinner, and when this young man recognised Miss Irvine, his heart leaped up within him. What was he to do ? He had come to Polruth with the firm intention of keeping his secret, of speaking to her only when other persons were present, and of avoiding all risk of self-betrayal. Prudence, therefore, counselled

a swift and silent retreat, and he actually did turn round and take as many as six steps in the direction of the village before he stopped to see whether prudence might not be open to argument. What happens under such circumstances we all know. Prudence is always vanquished before the argument begins, and in another minute Clare heard a voice behind her saying, ‘Miss Irvine, how do you do ?’

The voice had an odd tremor in it ; it said a great deal more than the above meaningless phrase—a great deal more than it had any business to say. And when Clare scrambled to her feet and turned round, she met a pair of liquid grey eyes which spoke so plainly that she somewhat hurriedly dropped her own under their gaze. But it was without any other sign of trouble than this that she held out her hand, saying frankly, ‘How do you do, Mr. Vidal ? So you have really come to Polruth, after all. I am so glad.’

‘You are very kind to say so,’ murmured Vidal. He was not accustomed to feel embarrassed in the presence of man or woman, and had perhaps never before in his life been at a loss for words ; but now commonplaces seemed to stick in his throat, and he could only stand and look at her as she faced him there, with the sinking sun making a blaze of sea and sky behind her, and turning her hair into a nimbus. The moment had come, then ! He had hardly known how intensely he had longed for it ; he had not expected that it would move him so deeply ; he was really afraid to open his lips, lest the thoughts that were in him should escape through them against his will. Oh, miserable pettiness of an artificial state of society, which held him tongue-tied because, forsooth, his income was numbered in three figures instead of four ! How was it possible for mortal man, with all his inner being in such a condition of ferment, to begin talking about the weather and the unpunctuality of the trains ?

Perhaps it was not possible. At all events, Vidal continued speechless, and it was Miss Irvine who expressed a hope that the heat had not made his journey very disagreeable. ‘We have been having a most beautiful summer,’ she said, ‘and everybody prophesies that it is going to last. I hope it will ; because, if so, you will see Polruth at its best, and perhaps, as my brothers are at home, you won’t find it so overpoweringly dull. You know that Mr. Heriot is here ?’

Vidal said ‘Yes,’ and did not add that, all things considered, he would have been just as well pleased if Mr. Heriot

had not been there. They were walking back towards the village by this time, and he was wondering whether he would ever be alone with her again. Probably not. He could foresee what was coming. With a host of noisy young men swarming round him, and with Heriot for ever on the watch, it was not likely that such moments as these would recur. Well, perhaps it was best so.

'Do you remember our walk on the Rigi?' he asked abruptly.

'Oh yes; how wet and disagreeable it was! You went on to some place in the mountains afterwards, didn't you? Have you been long back in England?'

Wet and disagreeable!—was that the only memory that she had preserved of an afternoon which she had so often lived through again in his thoughts? Vidal's heart sank: he answered her questions mechanically, and scarcely listened to her while she enumerated the various diversions by which the monotony of life at Polruth might be relieved. What were lawn tennis, and fishing for bass, and picnics to him? Yet, as they walked on, he could not but observe that her manner had lost its accustomed calm, that she was talking more and talking faster than she had ever done at Lucerne, and that all the time she looked straight in front of her, instead of turning sometimes towards her companion, as it would have been more natural to do. Now Vidal, though in love, had not so far parted with his powers of induction as not to know what this meant. His secret was evidently a secret no longer. Whether the discovery of it had been agreeable or disagreeable to Miss Irvine he could not tell; but he saw that she had made the discovery, and that it was agitating her. He did not offer to accompany her beyond the door of his lodgings, and secretly hoped that she might understand and appreciate this act of self-denial. Whether she did so or not, she was unmistakably relieved to be set free.

'Papa or one of the boys will come down and see you after breakfast to-morrow,' she said; 'and you must not expect to be allowed much time for work while you are here.'

She paused and opened her lips, as if she were going to add something, but seemed to change her mind, and only said, 'Good-night,' as she turned away.

Vidal watched her out of sight, then slowly climbed the stairs to his sitting-room. He threw himself down upon the broad window-seat, and, with his folded arms resting upon the

sill, looked out across the bay. He was two-thirds remorseful and one-third glad that he had broken down so deplorably at the very outset. That he should have done so did not say much for his self control ; but her knowledge of the truth would make his future part in some ways less difficult to play ; ‘and after all,’ thought he, ‘it is not exactly my fault if she has found out to-day what she must have found out sooner or later ; I said nothing that I ought not to have said ; I didn’t stay with her a moment longer than mere civility required. Unless I had gone away without speaking to her at all, I hardly see how I could have behaved with more discretion. And in any case I must have seen her to-morrow, when she would infallibly have detected me. Don’t women always know when a man loves them ?’

He got what solace he could out of such sophistries as these, and then, dismissing the question of responsibility from his mind, fell to thinking of how lovely she was, and recalling all her words and movements, while the daylight faded out of the west, and the sea changed from blue to grey, and the stars came out, one by one.

Early the next morning Mr. Irvine made his appearance, charged by his wife with many messages, the exact wording of which he was compelled to own that he had forgotten on the way. ‘But I know,’ he concluded, ‘that I have strict orders to take you back to Cardrew with me, and I can say on my own account that we shall all be very much disappointed if you do not treat us like friends, and lunch and dine with us whenever you are disposed. It doesn’t look very friendly to have left you to house yourself in lodgings ; but I think Mrs. Irvine explained to you that we are full to the roof just now. We are such a large family,’ continued the old gentleman with something of a sigh, ‘that I often have difficulty in recollecting our exact numbers and names. However, Mrs. Irvine will be able to tell you that—and the more the merrier, you know,’ he concluded cheerfully.

Vidal was not quite sure about the universal application of the proverb ; but he said what was polite, and signified his willingness to be entertained. He was just then under the full influence of that beatific vision which comes once (let us hope at least once) to all mortals, and which, while it lasts, has power to convert the tamest landscape into a paradise, if only this be connected in some way with one especial person ; but even though Cardrew had not been glorified by the

presence of Clare Irvine, and though the lanes which led up to the house from Polruth had never received her footprints, Vidal must still have acknowledged that he had seldom seen anything more beautiful in its own way than the view which unfolded itself around him as he was conducted towards his destination. Beauty of scenery, like all other kinds of beauty, is more or less a matter of taste. ‘Shrubs and lowly tamarisks please not all,’ as the Latin grammar taught us long ago. In the last century the Alps were more shuddered at than admired ; and there are people who find the north coast of Cornwall too wild and forbidding. But these, perhaps, have not had the advantage of studying it in fair weather. When the south wind blows softly, and the slowly heaving ocean is calm ; when the flocks of sea-birds that congregate upon the rocks and the dark cliffs can sun themselves in peace ; when the gorse and the heather have spread a mantle of purple and gold over the moors ; and when the moisture that is always in the air lends a blue softness to all distant outlines, a man need not be so fortunate as to be in love in order to feel the peculiar charm of the region. Trees, it must be owned, are not numerous, and such as there are have been blown out of all symmetry by the furious winter gales ; but in sheltered places vegetation is rich, and every whitewashed cottage has its fuchsia trees and its giant scarlet geraniums.

Cardrew, which stands on the hill-side, facing a point or two south of west, was built at a time when architects thought less of shelter from prevailing winds than of solidity of construction ; but something has been done in the way of high stone walls and belts of hardy shrubs to protect the garden ; so that Vidal was able conscientiously to compliment his host upon the brilliant flower-beds through which he made his way towards the lawn, where four youths in white flannels were playing tennis.

Mrs. Irvine hurried forward to welcome the stranger and to relieve her husband, who promptly disappeared. ‘How glad I am to see you ! I told Clare she ought to have brought you back to dinner last night, but she said she was sure you wouldn’t have come without dressing—quite unnecessary ! Please understand, once for all, that we are not going to send you formal invitations. You are to come here whenever you like, and dress exactly as you please. What is the use of living in an out-of-the-way place if one can’t dispense with formality ? Now I must introduce my boys to you. This is

Jack, my eldest son, who is still at college. Charlie I think I told you about : he is to be a soldier, I hope. Bob is in the navy ; and the one who is trying to get behind the rhododendrons is Dick, who hasn't left school yet. Dick is shy—the only member of our family who was ever known to suffer in that way. Come out, Dick, and shake hands with Mr. Vidal. There are two others, Tommy and Billy, somewhere—'

'In the yard, helping Jonas to cart muck,' interpolated the timid Dick, in a deep bass voice.

'You don't mean to say so ! Then I trust they will stay where they are ; for I know that nothing will induce them to wash their hands before luncheon. Now, boys, go on with your game ; I am sure Mr. Vidal will excuse you.'

Mr. Vidal would most willingly have excused the absence of every man, woman, and child in the house, except one ; but he did not belong to that disagreeable class of lovers who show the depth of their affection for a single individual by assuming a savage demeanour towards all others, and he soon made friends with the rising generation of Irvines, whom he found to be very pleasant young fellows.

They came and sat down beside him presently, Mrs. Irvine having retired into the house, and put themselves and their resources at his disposition as cordially as their parents had done. Did he care about potting rabbits ? and had he brought his gun with him ? If not, he could use Jack's whenever he liked, because Jack put on such a lot of side now that he wouldn't condescend to that humble form of sport. If sea-fishing was at all in his line, he could have abundance of that any day. Or, as he had not been in Cornwall before, perhaps he would like to visit some of the lions of the neighbourhood.

'I'll tell you what,' cried Bob excitedly ; 'I'll drive you over to Tintagel one day in the dog-cart. You ought to see Tintagel, you know, and I can take you by some short cuts that save miles.'

'I should rather think he would !' said Jack. 'He'd take you over a stone wall or two, most likely, because the horse would be sure to run away with him, and he'd never find it out till he tried to pull up. Don't you let Bob entice you into getting into a wheeled vehicle beside him. He tries it on with every stranger who comes here, because he knows very well that none of us are going to risk our lives for his amusement. Only the other day, in a moment of weakness,

I allowed him to take the reins, and he wouldn't give them up again at any price. I don't think I ever was in such a funk in all my life. First we cannoned against a farmer's gig and smashed his shaft ; then we ran over a pig—'

'We did no such thing,' interrupted Bob angrily. 'We only just grazed the pig, and we should have cleared the other craft right enough if she had answered her helm properly. You fellows think nobody, except yourselves, can do the simplest thing.'

'No, no, Bob,' said his elder brother ; 'we have implicit confidence in you when you are upon your proper element ; but on dry land we prefer to take care of our own necks ; and if Mr. Vidal will be advised by me, he won't let you try experiments upon his. Anyhow, I can promise you one thing : you won't drive *my* mare any more.'

'I don't see much fun in driving about the country this hot weather,' remarked Charley. 'Much better stop at home and play lawn tennis.'

The guest seemed disposed to concur in this view. 'Does your sister ever play ?' he asked carelessly ; to which Jack replied, 'Oh yes, sometimes—when there's another girl here. But women rather spoil the game, don't you think so ?'

After a time, Heriot strolled across the grass, with a straw hat on the back of his head and a newspaper under his arm ; and Vidal felt himself colouring guiltily as his friend approached. But Heriot's face did not express disapprobation. All he said, on joining the group, was, 'Well, Adrian, so you've found your way to Cornwall ;' after which he remarked that it must be getting near luncheon-time.

By-and-by the young men went indoors to change their flannels, so that Vidal had an opportunity of saying penitently, 'I couldn't help it, old man—I really couldn't !'

Heriot made no reply ; but after a moment he astonished his companion a good deal by exclaiming abruptly, 'I wish I were in your shoes !'

'Wish you were in my shoes !' echoed Vidal. 'Why, in the name of all that's unreasonable, should you wish that ? If ever there was a miserable man upon the face of the earth—'

'Quite so ; but then misery such as yours is worth more than all the contentment that ever I have got out of life, or shall get. Go on !—enjoy yourself—make the most of your time. And when the day of tribulation arrives, come to me

and we will mingle our tears. I'm not going to trouble you with any more sage precepts : events must take their course now. You had it open to you to choose whether you would come here or stay away, and you have chosen. Far be it from me to suggest unavailing regrets !'

Vidal glanced at the speaker with a mixture of vexation and amusement. 'I can't quite make out whether you blame me or not, Heriot,' he said.

'Neither can I,' answered Heriot. 'Suppose we go in.'

Clare only made her appearance when the rest of the party were entering the dining-room. She took a place on the opposite side of the table to Vidal, and although she spoke to him several times, and was as friendly as everybody else, he could not help noticing that she avoided meeting his eyes. 'She knows that I love her,' thought the young man, with an inward exultation which he did not attempt to repress : 'and that is all that I ever dared to hope for. She doesn't care for me—I can see that—and I'm glad she doesn't. Am I glad ? Well, no—hardly. And yet I believe old Heriot is right, and pain such as this is better than years of bovine contentment. I wouldn't have it otherwise if I could. Perhaps I could if I would ; for love begets love, they say. But I won't ! I'll keep out of her way ; I won't even speak to her if I can help it ; and if I find myself giving way ever so little, I'll be off the next morning.'

While these and other thoughts were passing through his mind he was conversing cheerily with his entertainers, supported, like the Spartan youth with the fox gnawing him under his garment, by conscious heroism. Probably other persons in the same room had an equal title to self-approval, from Mr. Irvine, who had Jack's bills to pay, down to Tommy and Billy, who were seldom free from the dread that one of their many delinquencies was on the point of discovery ; for in the tragic comedy of life every man and woman has a part to play, and those who act best are deservedly the most liked. But the generality of us wear a mask simply because we must, and cannot, therefore, claim all the credit that belonged to this voluntary victim.

CHAPTER IX

THE REWARD OF SELF-DENIAL

DURING the month of August, with which the present history has to do, two phenomena occurred in the neighbourhood of Polruth. In the first place, no rain fell, except in the shape of an occasional shower, for three consecutive weeks. This, astonishing as it was, was merely a local and meteorological phenomenon : the second, though less remarked, was certainly more remarkable ; being, indeed, nothing less than a phenomenon in the working of human nature. For it is a positive fact that, throughout the whole of the above-mentioned time, Vidal saw Miss Irvine every day, and never, by word, deed, or sign, attempted to make love to her. He sought the society of her brothers, who swore by him when they discovered that he knew how to use the graceful limbs with which Nature had provided him, and was a better swimmer and lawn-tennis player than any of them. Mr. Irvine found in him a patient admirer of ancient coins and mediæval art ; while Mrs. Irvine, who had liked him from the first, took him up with the ardour which she had ever at the disposal of a fresh *protégé*, and introduced him to all her neighbours, with whispered assurances that he was a young man of extraordinary talent—the coming novelist of the day. But to Clare he was just civil, and no more. If he saw her—as he often did—walking past his lodgings towards her favourite headland, he watched her from the window until she was out of sight, and then went resolutely back to his writing. At Cardrew he avoided every possibility of being left alone with her, and more than once declined to join a riding party because he foresaw the dangers to which that form of exercise might so easily give rise.

All this self-repression was not accomplished without pain, insomnia, and loss of appetite. If it was absurd—if it was illogical—if it was calculated to produce exactly the opposite effect to that intended, it was nevertheless a victory in its way, and a victory of a kind which is not very often won. For that much Vidal may be allowed to have credit ; and in truth he was disposed to take a good deal of credit to himself at this time. He was quite astonished when Heriot said to him one day, ‘Merely as a matter of curiosity, I should like very much

to know whether you are playing a deep and skilful game, or whether you really have the simplicity to imagine yourself a martyr.'

He stared for a moment, and then answered quietly, 'That is a hard speech to make about any man, Heriot. I understand what you mean; but I don't know that I have ever given you the right to suspect me of being such a miserable humbug.'

Heriot flushed slightly. He was conscious that his irritation had led him into saying more than he ought to have done, and he apologised. 'But I can't help thinking it a pity that you should have taken up this particular line of conduct,' he added. 'It would have been so simple to go away.'

'I would have gone away if it had been necessary,' Vidal said; 'but it is not necessary. I saw plainly enough, the first day, that she didn't care a rush for me. Yes, I know—I remember what you said at Lucerne. It is just possible that she might have come to care for me in the long run, if I had tried to make her. Well, I haven't tried.'

'Oh, but, my dear fellow, the passive way of trying is so much worse than the active!' returned Heriot, half laughing.

The young man turned away with a gesture of impatience. 'I wish to Heaven you would let me alone!' he exclaimed. 'You said you wouldn't lecture me any more. The long and the short of it is that I *can't* go away yet. You think she may be piqued into loving me because I draw back from her; but you don't understand. I believe she is perfectly well aware of how things are with me. She doesn't care. You can see for yourself that her spirits haven't suffered.'

Now, it was precisely because he thought that her spirits *had* suffered that Heriot had allowed himself to be provoked into breaking his self-imposed silence; but, not choosing to say this, he shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

This colloquy had taken place in the garden at Cardrew; and after his friend had left him, Vidal sat down upon a bench and thought. Hitherto he had tried to steer a course midway between duty and inclination, and, oddly enough, had succeeded after a fashion; but now he began to see that success of that kind could not be permanent. He was young; he was suffering from the torments of unrequited love; he felt the imperious craving for happiness natural to one of his years, and his sanguine nature was for ever whispering to him that happiness was not unattainable. He had a struggle which lasted for five

minutes, and left him somewhat pale. Then—‘I’ll go,’ he said softly, and rising up, walked towards the house.

His intention was to burn his ships by giving out forthwith that he was obliged to leave Polruth on the morrow ; but when he entered the hall, he found everybody too busy to listen to him. For it had been arranged that a long-deferred visit to Tintagel should take place that day, and just now luncheon-baskets were being packed, and details discussed amidst the clamour which accompanied all movements of the Irvine family. Vidal listlessly looked on their preparations from the background. Clare, looking cool and fresh in a pale-blue print dress, was moving about among her brothers, lending a helping hand here and there, and did not seem to have noticed his arrival. An unreasonable anger took possession of the young man as he watched her. Was she so pitiless, then ? Didn’t she see how he suffered ? Knowing that he loved her, was it nothing to her whether he declared his love or not ? There was a good deal of the spoilt child in his composition, and he thought, ‘Well, perhaps when I am gone she will be sorry—at least for a time.’

Presently the carriages came round to the door, and a dispute arose as to the distribution of the party, from which also Vidal held aloof. Let them settle it among themselves, and put him where they pleased ! Upon the whole, he would rather prefer not to be in the same carriage as Miss Irvine. Nevertheless, he was not very sorry when Mr. and Mrs. Irvine, Heriot, and Charley got into the landau and were driven away, followed by a small waggonette containing the younger boys and the luncheon. The only remaining vehicle belonging to the establishment was, as he knew, Jack’s dog-cart, which it was evident that Clare, Bob, and himself were to share with its owner.

‘I hope you don’t mind the back seat, Vidal,’ said the latter. ‘Of course, you are very welcome to drive, though, if you’d rather.’

‘Thanks,’ answered Vidal, laughing, ‘but I have made it a rule through life never to drive another man’s horses in his presence, and the back seat will do me very well.’ He was foolish enough to feel a thrill of pleasure at the prospect of passing his last few hours of comparative happiness in such close proximity to the object of his hopeless passion.

The dog-cart was some time in making its appearance, and Jack began at length to grow fidgety. ‘Bob said he would

put the mare in,' he remarked ; 'but I don't believe he has the slightest idea of how to set about it ; and there's nobody to help him. Perhaps I had better go and see what he is doing.'

However, at this moment Bob, beaming with satisfaction and flourishing his whip, pulled up at the door with a dash. 'Now, you needn't look at the gear in that suspicious way,' he said, 'because it's all right. Do you suppose I never harnessed a horse before in my life ?'

'Well, you've done better than I expected,' Jack confessed, after making a few alterations and helping his sister into her place. 'Now then, Bob, give me the reins and jump down.'

'Jump down, indeed !' returned Bob loftily. 'Not exactly ! No, my dear boy, you jump up. You are going to have the honour and pleasure of being piloted by me to-day.'

'Nonsense, Bob ! don't play the fool,' said Jack with some impatience. 'We've got a long drive before us, and I don't want to waste time. Come !—hand over the reins.'

'*Beati possidentes*,' replied the other placidly, without moving. 'You won't turn me out without a fight for it, I can tell you.'

A fight would undoubtedly have ensued then and there if Clare had not intervened. 'Let him drive for once, Jack,' she pleaded. 'He won't be with us much longer, you know, and he will promise to be very careful—won't you, Bob ?'

'I am always careful,' Bob affirmed ; 'but to-day I shall surpass myself. And look here, Jack : if I damage the beast I'll buy you another as soon as ever I can save up enough money. There ! I can't say no fairer than that.'

'And how about our funeral expenses ?' inquired Jack. But as he was a very good-natured young man, he made no further objections, and scrambled up beside Vidal, to whom he remarked, with a sigh, 'If I had only foreseen this, I should have insisted upon your driving. But it is just wildly possible that we may pull through without a smash.'

This was very consolatory. Vidal, remembering that a life far more precious than his own was being placed in jeopardy, inwardly commended the adventurous Bob to the devil ; but it was hardly his part to enter a demurrer, so he smiled, and held his peace.

They were driven at a quiet pace down the park ; though, on turning out of the gates, the trap gave a lurch which caused Jack to draw in his breath sharply. 'For the love of

'Heaven, man,' he exclaimed, 'don't take your corners like that ! Try to recollect that we're on two wheels, not four.'

'You're only fit to be trundled about upon one,' retorted the other. 'A wheelbarrow is the conveyance for you. Never saw such a nervous chap as you are in my life.'

And with that he gave the mare a cut with the whip, which made her throw herself into her collar and accomplish the next quarter of a mile at a speed that called forth some subdued remonstrance from Clare. Then, more by good luck than good guidance, they passed a couple of carts without a collision, and turned off the high road into a narrow lane.

'Now,' said Bob exultantly, 'I'll show you the short cuts.'

Jack groaned. 'It's no use protesting,' he said to Vidal. 'Sit tight, and let us pray that we may be upset in a soft place.'

'Or that we may not be upset at all,' suggested Vidal.

'Oh, that's past praying for. And, by George ! here's a flock of sheep. Now he'll run us up that bank—I know he will !'

The prophecy was hardly uttered before it was fulfilled. The dog-cart swayed, balanced itself for a momemt on the off wheel, and then turned over with a crash, sending its occupants flying into the opposite ditch. Fortunately, the fall was so gradual that nothing about them suffered, except their clothes and their dignity. Vidal, after standing on his head for a minute, struggled into an attitude more convenient for making observations, and found that his companions were already erect. Clare was replacing her hat, which had fallen off ; the two young men were standing over the ruins of the cart ; and up a distant hill the mare, who had kicked herself free, could be seen galloping, with the broken shafts dangling at her sides.

'This,' remarked Jack sadly, 'comes of letting a sailor drive.'

Bob tilted his hat over his eyes, scratched his head, and looked crestfallen. 'I'm awfully sorry,' he said ; 'but it was the sort of thing that might have happened to anybody. I don't suppose I should have done it if you hadn't flurried me so ; but I saw we were going to foul the bank, and I believe I made a mistake and took a haul at the port rein instead of the starboard. I'll pay for the damage,' he added ruefully.

'Wait till you know what it is,' returned Jack. 'I shouldn't wonder if the mare were to kill herself.'

Happily, however, this apprehension proved to be un-

founded ; for Bob had not yet started in pursuit when a labourer appeared leading the runaway animal. He had caught her, as he affirmed, at the risk of his life, and demanded adequate remuneration.

'And now,' said Jack, when this business-like person had been dismissed, 'the question is, what are we to do ?'

'I know what I am going to do,' answered Clare, laughing; 'I am going to make the best of my way home.'

'But we must manage to let the others know what has become of us somehow, or they'll think we've broken our necks. Bob, the least you can do is to follow them and tell them of your success. I suppose you can hire a trap of some kind at Polruth—and somebody to drive it for you.—What will you do, Vidal ? It's a pity you should miss seeing Tintagel.'

But Vidal answered, with perfect truth, that he didn't care very much about Tintagel, and Bob scouted the idea of returning to Polruth and searching about for a conveyance. 'I'll foot it,' he said. 'I can cut across country, and I shall catch them up before they have done half the distance.'

And without more ado he set off at a slinging trot, being perhaps not unwilling to testify in some measure to his penitence.

CHAPTER X

A SUMMER AFTERNOON

THUS it came to pass that circumstances for which he was in no wise responsible placed a conscientious man in a quandary. Jack, who had to see about getting the wreck of his dog-cart transported to Cardrew, evidently took it for granted that Vidal would walk home with his sister ; and, indeed, no other arrangement seemed possible. Yet Vidal could not but perceive that such a proceeding would be fraught with the gravest peril. What he feared just now was not so much that the betrayal of his passion in words might call forth some response, as that the faint hopes which he still cherished might be crushed out of him by a point-blank refusal. Indeed, he felt convinced that this calamity must inevitably befall him if he spoke ; and yet he knew himself well enough to be aware that to spend the

remainder of the day with Clare and to hold his peace would be a task so difficult as to be well-nigh impossible. Recognising, therefore, the dangers that threatened him, he wisely determined to see her as far as the lodge, and there bid her farewell. The necessity of packing up for an early start the next day would give him a sufficient excuse for returning to his lodgings.

But Vidal, like the rest of the world, was a better hand at forming resolutions than at carrying them into effect ; and when Clare and he had reached the entrance to Cardrew, he had not yet so much as announced his impending departure. Up to this point the walk had not been exactly an enjoyable one. There had been an uncomfortable feeling of restraint on both sides which had made the way seem long ; yet, although the young people had kept up conversation with some difficulty, and had said nothing that was not absolutely flat and commonplace, they had been exchanging thoughts through some more subtle medium than that of speech, and Vidal was no longer able to take a dispassionate view of the situation. He understood that Clare had been asking him the whole time what was the matter with him ; and he had answered, ‘The matter is that I adore you, and that I must not say so.’ Now, while he held the gate open for her to pass through, she said, after a momentary hesitation, ‘Will you not come up to the house ? Jack will be back soon, and we can give you a luncheon of some sort.’ And Vidal, feeling that all strength of purpose had gone out of him, let the gate swing back, murmuring, rather foolishly, ‘Oh, thanks—if I shan’t be in the way.’

Every now and then—not often, of course ; still, every now and then—it happens to most of us to make up our minds that we will do the things that we ought not to do : and on those rare and delightful occasions such of us as are wise at once kick conscience overboard. For if one cannot do wrong without suffering from pangs of remorse the whole time, it is surely better to stick to the dull path of duty, and preserve at least one’s self-respect. A certain merry cardinal, now no more, once found himself at a great dinner in Rome during Lent. There was fish for him, and there were vegetables, and of these he partook freely, getting what comfort he could out of them and maintaining a cheerful countenance. But when a haunch of venison made its appearance his brow became clouded with care ; for his soul, like the

scul of Isaac, loved venison, and he could not bring himself either to let the dish pass or to indulge his appetite. If he had only neglected the fish he might have stretched a point and allowed himself a little meat for his stomach's sake ; but to eat both fish and flesh at one and the same meal was what no ecclesiastic could do without falling into sin. For some moments the conflict which was raging within him was visible by outward signs to his neighbours ; then, breaking into a jolly laugh, '*Basta !*' he exclaimed, '*mi confessero !*' So he swallowed the venison and enjoyed it, and, let us hope, duly performed penance the next day. Vidal had this in common with his Eminence, that he neither deceived himself nor repented at the wrong moment. As soon as he had yielded to temptation his heart grew lighter, and he thought, 'Well, since this is to be my last day with her, it shall be as happy a one as I can make it.' He let himself go ; he began to talk, without first thinking of every word that he said ; and Clare's spirits also seemed to rise in sympathy with his ; so that, before long, the cloud which had arisen between them of late was all but dispelled.

In due course they discovered that they were hungry ; and then they had luncheon together in the dining-room, which seemed strangely silent and empty with only two people seated at the long table. One of them, at all events, desired no addition to their number, and longed only for time to stand still.

'Do you know, I am very glad you let Bob drive,' he could not help saying ; and Clare did not ask him why he was glad, but only laughed, and blushed ever so slightly.

They had finished their meal before Jack came in, apologising quite needlessly for having been so long, and explaining that he had had a great deal of trouble in finding somebody to bring the cart home. When he had stayed a vigorous appetite, he proposed a cigar and a game of billiards to his guest, who replied that he didn't want to smoke, and that it would be a sin to stay indoors on such a fine afternoon.

'We might have a knock-up at lawn tennis, then,' suggested the innocent Jack.

'All right, if you like,' answered Vidal ; 'but don't you think it's too hot to run about ?'

'But we can't lie on our backs in the garden till dinner-time,' remonstrated the other.

'Oh, I don't know,' said Vidal ; 'I think I could.—What shall you do, Miss Irvine ?'

Clare replied that she meant to sit out in the shade somewhere ; and then, to Vidal's great relief, Jack said, 'Well, if you don't mind, I think I'll just stroll down to Polruth and see if I can't find out something about the otter-hounds. I heard they were to meet near this next week, and I should like to show you an otter-hunt, Vidal, if you've never seen one.'

In this way Vidal's destiny led him into pleasant places. Sitting on a bench in the shade, with the object of his adoration beside him, with the slumberous murmur of insects in his ears, and with all the sunny landscape stretched out before him till it dropped abruptly to meet the blue Atlantic far beneath, he surrendered himself to the bliss of the passing moments, and began to realise what is so seldom realised by mortals, the delight of living in the present. Only to watch Clare, to listen to her, to meet her eyes every now and again, was enough, and he almost forgot that a morrow was coming which would find him journeying towards London and duty. At any rate, if some suppressed consciousness of this sad fact was in his mind, he would not suffer any hint of it to pass his lips, thinking, very sensibly, that it would be time enough to say what must be said when the others returned from Tintagel.

But, considering the condition of mind that he was in, this and all other matters that he might desire to conceal were evidently at the mercy of hazard. His colloquy with Clare was not continuous, but was broken by irregular intervals of silence more dangerous than speech. During one of these Vidal glanced at his neighbour, whose hands were lying idly in her lap, and who was, to all appearance, plunged in profound meditation. She remained so long without stirring that at last he could not refrain from asking softly, 'What are you thinking about, Miss Irvine ?'

She started, smiled, and made the reply which is usually made to that absurd question, 'Oh, about nothing particular.'

If she had answered quite truthfully, she would have had to say, 'About you ;' but not being disposed to submit to further cross-examination, she uttered the meaningless phrase above recorded ; and, by way of changing the subject, followed it up with a question on her own score : 'Are you writing another book ?'

'Oh yes,' answered Vidal; 'that is my trade, you know.' He had wondered more than once why, during the whole time that he had been in Cornwall, Clare had never said a word to him about his literary pursuits; but, to be sure, he had given her little opportunity for doing so.

There was another short pause before she resumed: 'Is it to be like the last?'

'I hope not,' answered Vidal, with a laugh. 'The last didn't give universal satisfaction, as I dare say you are aware.'

'Didn't it?' said Clare; and then, rather hesitatingly, 'Do you mind my saying that I didn't like it very much?'

'I don't mind in the least,' replied Vidal, who, however, minded a good deal. 'No one knows better than I do that it was a dull book.'

'Oh, it was not that; it was extremely clever, I thought—only of course I am no judge. But—but is it quite *true*? Do you think people are really as bad as you make them out?'

'I should say they were—quite,' answered Vidal. 'The fact is, that I didn't know I had painted humanity at all particularly black.'

'You painted London society very black, at all events. And there were no nice people in the book—at least no nice women.'

'I thought some of them were rather nice in their way,' said Vidal.

In truth, he had tried to make them so; but as he had drawn most of his characters from real life, and had not, perhaps, penetrated much beneath the surface of their real lives, their defects had been rendered more prominent than their virtues.

'You seem to have no belief in women,' pursued Clare. 'You seem to think that they are all deceitful and vain and greedy, and that the things which they covet most in the world are plenty of money and plenty of admirers. I don't think that is the truth.'

'Oh, but indeed,' cried the young man eagerly, 'you are doing me a great injustice—or else I must have expressed myself very badly—if you think that is what I meant. I was writing about a particular class, and I never thought of passing such a sweeping censure, even upon that class. I took what I believed to be types of it, that was all.'

'And is your heroine a type of it?'

'Which do you call the heroine?'

'I supposed she was the heroine ; at all events, there is more about her in the book than about anybody else. I mean the wretch who is in love with the hero, and who refuses to leave her husband, whom she hates, because she can't bear to lose her money and her position.'

Vidal felt a little uncomfortable. He remembered certain passages in his book which he would just as soon that Miss Irvine should not have read, and he understood that what appeared to him to be a temperate enough picture of modern society might easily strike her as an abominable libel. 'I am afraid such people do exist,' he said at length.

'Perhaps they do. There is Lady St. Austell, for instance—and I have heard of others. But surely they can't be so numerous as to be typical.' She paused for a moment, and then gave utterance to the phrase which has made domestic criticism so appalling to many a writer. 'You say fashionable women are like that,' she remarked ; 'but—how do you know they are ?'

Now, Vidal's past career, if not absolutely immaculate, would have borne looking into quite as well as that of the generality of young men who have lived in the world ; but he was not prepared to tell Miss Irvine the exact means by which he had arrived at his knowledge of a certain variety of feminine character. So he answered, 'Oh, well, a good deal of it is hearsay, of course. One must be guided in some degree by hearsay.'

The effect of this admission was eminently satisfactory. 'I should not have thought that hearsay was a very safe guide,' Clare rejoined ; but it was plain that the writer's chief offence in her eyes had now been removed. 'By-and-by,' she added, 'you will think me very presumptuous for saying all this ; but I have wanted for such a long time to ask you whether you really meant what I fancied you did ; and I am so glad that you don't.'

'One writes of what one sees and hears,' Vidal said. 'Perhaps I have had rather too much of the atmosphere of London. If I had been near you—I mean, if I had been living at Polruth when I wrote that book, it would have been a very different production.'

'And the next one will have been partly written at Polruth, will it not ? I hope, from your saying that, that you find the atmosphere of Cornwall inspiring, and that you won't be in a hurry to leave it.'

'I must leave it,' returned the young man abruptly. 'I am going away to-morrow.'

What made him come out with this blunt statement, and add no single word of explanation to it, he hardly knew ; but it may be that he was not wholly innocent of a dramatic intention. He was looking down when he spoke ; but presently he stole a glance out of the corner of his eye, and saw that Clare appeared not only startled but displeased.

'We shall all be very sorry to lose you,' she said, rather coldly ; 'but it is natural that you should be bored here.'

'Bored !' exclaimed Vidal. 'But you can't think that. I have never been so happy in my life as during these last three weeks—yes ; in spite of everything, I have never been so happy ; and perhaps I shall never be so happy again. I would give ten of the years that I may still have before me to stay another month at Polruth—if I dared.'

'If you dared ?' repeated Clare, with raised eyebrows.

'Yes—if I dared. Don't you understand ? I know you understand. I have been here too long as it is. Heriot said I ought never to have come ; and perhaps he was right. I didn't mean to tell you this ; but you'll forgive it, I hope, now that I am going away so soon.'

'Why must you go ?' asked Clare in a low voice.

He broke into a short laugh. 'Why ? Because I have only six hundred a year in the world, and because if I had six thousand you wouldn't care for me.'

Clare made no answer ; but she looked at him, and her eyes spoke a language which could not be misinterpreted.

Lector dilectissime, you have been young, possibly you are young still. It may be that you are yet conjugating the verb *amare* in the present tense, indicative mood, active and passive voices, whereas some of us have long since got on to the past tenses, and even to the conjunctive moods of these. But to whichever category you may belong, you must be aware that there are circumstances under which prudence ceases to be either possible or desirable, and you will therefore readily understand how it came to pass that Jack Irvine, sauntering homewards from the village, became aware of two figures seated in the garden above him, and was presently astounded to see them draw closer together and lose distinctness of outline in a close embrace. Jack was a young man who possessed some clearness of mental, as well as of physical vision, and his

comments upon what he had witnessed were brief and to the purpose.

'By George!' he exclaimed aloud, after a protracted whistle; 'there'll be a row in the house this journey, and no mistake! I don't believe the fellow has got enough to keep himself; and who the deuce was to suspect what he was after all this time? Why, he has hardly spoken a dozen words to her since he has been down here! Pretty bad form, I must say, keeping things dark like that.'

Then, as he did not wish to play the spy any longer, he turned away and marched off in the opposite direction, with his hands in his pockets, meditating mournfully.

CHAPTER XI

DREAMS

Possibly Jack Irvine, whose notion of a desirable brother-in-law was that such a person should be the owner, at the very least, of a country house and good shooting, may have been over-ready to assume that the requirements of his parents must necessarily be the same as his own, and that they would at once refuse to listen to any suitor in Vidal's circumstances. Be that as it may, the 'row' which he had foretold never came off. Poor Mrs. Irvine could not pretend to be very much pleased when Clare followed her into her bedroom that night and there made confession of what had occurred during the afternoon; but she neither reproached her daughter nor forbade the engagement. She had always been too kind-hearted to cherish schemes which were not compatible with the happiness of others, and although a son-in-law who, like Mr. Wilbraham, possessed money and lands, as well as influence in high quarters, would naturally have been more to her taste, it was not in her to reject Vidal merely on account of his poverty. So she only sighed, and said, 'I think he might have spoken to your father first. It would have shown better feeling if he had.'

'But he did not mean to speak to anybody,' Clare urged. 'He meant to go away to-morrow morning without saying a word; and I suppose he would have gone and there never would have been any explanation at all, but for that fortunate

accident. I shall always feel grateful to Bob for upsetting us out of the dog-cart.'

'He must never be allowed to do such a thing again!' cried Mrs. Irvine quickly—as though a repetition of the catastrophe might be expected to bring about a second improvident marriage. 'How Jack ever trusted him with the reins I cannot understand! But it is all very surprising to me. Oh, I don't mean to say a word against Mr. Vidal. I liked him from the first; and he is certainly very handsome and clever; only somehow he is not at all the sort of man whom I should have expected you to choose. And it is a pity that he should be so badly off; isn't it?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' assented Clare; 'but that is no fault of his; and, you know, we shall not be married for ever so long—not until he is making more money.' Then she put her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her. 'I am sorry, mamma,' she whispered. 'I know it is a disappointment, and you are very good about it. I did try to accept Mr. Wilbraham, and I thought perhaps I should be able to do it, until—until that time at Lucerne. Then I knew that it was not possible.'

'At Lucerne!' ejaculated Mrs. Irvine. 'Do you mean to say that it began so long ago as that? Well, in a sort of way, that is a relief; for I don't feel now as if I had been so much to blame in persuading him to come down here. Now, my dear child, you need not pull my cap off, because I really am quite fond of Mr. Vidal, and from what you tell me, I have no doubt that he tried to do what was right—only these things will happen, in spite of all precautions. I will talk to your father about it, and we shall see what he says. I can't promise that he will give his consent, you know.'

But Clare knew very well that Mr. Irvine's consent was precisely what her mother could safely answer for at all times, and she had no fears as to the result of a formal appeal to the head of the family. It seemed almost unfair to take advantage of such simplicity; and, indeed, this was very much the feeling that Vidal had when he was summoned to the old gentleman's study the next morning, and was received as affectionately as if he had been a millionaire.

'I am sure that you will make Clare happy,' Mr. Irvine was kind enough to say; 'and my wife tells me that you are sincerely attached to one another. That is the essential thing—no doubt that is the essential thing.'

'I think it is,' Vidal said. 'But,' he added, with a smile, 'I am afraid most fathers would consider it only one of the essentials ; and I wanted to say, Mr. Irvine, I hope you understand—that I intended to keep silence until I had a rather larger income to offer. It wouldn't be true to say that I regret having spoken ; but I do feel that I ought to be scolded. You are all much too kind and generous.'

'Oh, you mean about the money ?' Mr. Irvine said, rather vaguely. 'Yes, Mrs. Irvine was telling me. Six hundred a year—it isn't much, certainly. I suppose one couldn't live upon six hundred a year, could one ?'

The question was so evidently asked in perfect good faith that Vidal laughed outright. 'I believe people do live upon even less than that,' he replied ; 'but a very small income entails sacrifices which perhaps you would hardly like your daughter to put up with. I hope to be better off before long, and even now I make from about a hundred to a hundred and fifty more than the fixed sum that I have named ; still it would unquestionably be more prudent for us to wait awhile before thinking of marriage.'

Then he laughed again ; for he could not help being a little tickled by the whimsicality of his preaching prudence to his prospective father-in-law.

Mr. Irvine remained grave, and rubbed his head with an air of perplexity. 'The question of money,' he observed confidentially, 'is always a troublesome one. I used to think that I was pretty well off ; but nowadays, what with education and allowances, and one thing and another, there are so many payments that I am apt to forget how I stand—at least until I get my pass-book from the bank. But certainly we ought to help—oh yes ; we shall be able to help, to some extent ; and although it may not be as much as we could wish——' He broke off, and then asked, almost apologetically, 'Upon how little, now, do you think it could be done ?'

Vidal hesitated ; and indeed the question was not a very easy one to answer.

'Well,' resumed Mr. Irvine, 'I suppose a thousand a year would be the least. As you say, people do, no doubt, marry upon less ; but we should not like to think of Clare being in difficulties. Let me see : six and four make ten—four hundred, h'm !' He pinched his lower lip between his finger and thumb, and looked up with an appealing expression of helplessness. 'Well, I'm sure I don't know,' he said. 'Pos-

sibly some means might be devised—— But perhaps,’ suddenly brightening up—‘perhaps you had better consult Mrs. Irvine.

All this was by no means what Vidal had anticipated, and it affected him with a mixture of gratitude and compunction. Who would ever have supposed that there were such disinterested people in the world? He felt almost inclined to say, ‘But, my dear, good sir, you don’t know the rules of the game. It is only when your daughter marries a rich man that you are required to make handsome settlements. If she takes a fancy to a pauper, your course is to point out that you can’t afford to allow her anything; and then the match is broken off. You will be behaving very magnanimously by merely giving a conditional assent to our engagement.’

He did not make this speech at the time; but he did afterwards say something of the kind to Mrs. Irvine, who laughed at him. Did he flatter himself, she asked, that it was for love of him that they wished to make their daughter comfortable? And if they could spare a few hundreds a year (it would not be four hundred, she was afraid, but it might be three; and surely the harvest of Mr. Vidal’s pen would suffice to make up the deficiency)—if they could spare this money, how could it be better spent than in averting the ordeal of a long engagement?

‘I abhor long engagements!’ the good lady went on. ‘For the man it is all very well, because being engaged doesn’t interfere with any of his amusements; but the poor girl is in a wretched position. Young men fight shy of her, and the other girls generally laugh at her in their sleeves, and declare that it will never come to anything. And most frequently it does not come to anything, as I could prove to you by many instances in my own experience. But now, what I was thinking was this. In London, a thousand a year doesn’t go far. You would be just able to keep your heads above water, no doubt, and you would have enough to eat and drink; but you couldn’t attempt to go into society—and that makes life so dull for young people. But supposing that you were to take a house down here in Cornwall—and I know of several within reach that might do—there is the house that old Mrs. Tregenna used to live in, near St. Ives, for instance, and plenty of others—well, then, you see, you could live quite cheaply, and you would be able to keep a conveyance of some kind, and you could go about and see your friends. And the quiet of the

country, too—such a boon to a literary man ! Then, as to the furnishing, that could be managed at a very small cost. We should take our time about it ; we should attend sales ; and Mr. Irvine would be of the greatest use to you in picking up unexpected bargains ; for he knows every curiosity dealer in the West of England, not to mention that he has endless oak chests and chairs and things stowed away in an outhouse, because we haven't a corner to put them in. I really do believe that, with a little time and trouble, we could furnish your house almost for nothing.'

It will be seen that Mrs. Irvine's first feeling of chagrin had quite disappeared, and that she was looking forward to her daughter's marriage with that delight which an opportunity of arranging other people's affairs for them always afforded her. 'What do you think ?' she concluded anxiously.

'I think you are the kindest people I ever met or heard of,' answered the young man. 'Of course there is no necessity for our living in London, and I am sure you are right about the money going further here than there. My only doubt is whether I should be at all justified in accepting so much from you.'

'But it is Clare who accepts it, not you ; and when you are rich, as I am sure you will be after you have written another book or two, she need not take it any longer. Didn't I hear of somebody who had been paid five thousand pounds for a novel ? And a novel could not take much more than a year to write, I suppose ; so there is five thousand a year at once.'

Perhaps it was hardly worth while to dispute the trustworthiness of this off-hand calculation ; and indeed Mrs. Irvine (who had never read a syllable of Vidal's writings) had by this time quite convinced herself that the mantle of Dickens or Thackeray or George Eliot—it did not much matter which—had fallen upon the shoulders of her future son-in-law.

So it came to be an understood thing that Vidal and Clare, instead of waiting for an indefinite period, were to be married in the autumn, and this arrangement was fortunate enough to meet with an approval which was practically unanimous. Jack, while regretting that his sister should not have done better for herself and her family, admitted that, if she must needs wed a poor man, she couldn't have chosen a better fellow ; adding, as the result of his observation, that when

you had made up your mind to marry any particular person, you had best look sharp about it.

But Jack, to be sure, had not been consulted about the matter. Heriot, who had, was less accommodating. ‘Long engagements may be open to all the objections that you urge,’ was his reply to Mrs. Irvine’s representations ; ‘but I cannot see that there is any need for hurry in the present instance. Just now they are ready to consent to anything ; and no doubt this part of the world strikes them as being a sort of garden of Eden ; but it is probable that one of them will think differently before very long ; and then it might come to pass that you would regret having been so precipitate. Delightful as Cornwall is, it is not exactly the place of residence for a man who proposes to make his living by studies of modern life and character. Besides, they are both young, and they have known each other only a very short time. I really don’t think that waiting a year or so would do either of them much harm.’

‘It seems to me that you want the engagement to be broken off,’ cried Mrs. Irvine irritably ; for what she had applied for was approval, not advice.

‘Adrian Vidal is about the most intimate friend I have in the world,’ answered Heriot, ‘and I hope you know how I feel towards all of you. I have no more sincere wish than that both Clare and he should be happy.’

This somewhat ambiguous response satisfied Mrs. Irvine, who returned, in a tone calculated to silence further opposition, ‘Then let them be happy in their own way.’

For the time being, at all events, their happiness was complete. Their movements and their meetings were free from restriction of any kind, and except in the shape of some derisive raillery on the part of the boys, they incurred no penalty for withdrawing themselves from the daily amusements of those about them. Whether, in the course of their protracted rambles, they learned to know one another better, may be doubted, since they were both under the glamour of love ; but their mutual admiration increased—which was perhaps a more desirable thing. As for Vidal, he could hardly believe in his good fortune, and told Clare as much one day.

‘It seems too good to be true,’ he said. ‘To think of it ! Only a few days ago I was keeping myself alive upon a vestige—a mere vestige—of hope ; just a little peradventure which

I wouldn't allow common-sense to rob me of, though it tried hard. And now!—it is like a dream.'

She gave his arm a slight pressure, by way of proving that she was a substantial reality; and presently, looking up into his face, she said, 'Adrian, if I ask you a question, will you answer me?'

'Of course I will.'

'But truly, I mean—as you would answer if anybody else asked you.'

'Certainly—if I can.'

She paused for a moment, drawing some wild flowers which she had gathered through his button-hole, and then pulling them out again and throwing them away.

'Well?' said Vidal, smiling down upon her.

'Well, then—do you think that love lasts for ever?'

He answered 'Yes.' Perhaps no one, situated as he was, would or could have made any other reply; but it must be said for him that he believed himself to be speaking the truth. Love of the kind about which she was inquiring is a passion which may, in extreme cases, survive marriage by as much as a couple of years, but which far more frequently begins to fade after a few months of conjugal felicity; and of this abstract circumstance Vidal was just as well aware as the rest of the world. But then he knew that to every rule there are a few exceptions; and how could he doubt that their love for each other was of an exceptional kind? Had any two people ever loved so devotedly since the world began? It did not seem likely. So he said 'Yes' with a quiet mind, and emphasised his assertion in the customary manner.

But she drew a little away from him. 'You said just now that it was like a dream; and I am afraid it *is* a dream—it must be! Life can't really be so beautiful. And don't you think—don't you think that some day you may wake up?' She went on, without giving him time to reply, 'It is so with other people: one can't help seeing it. Men have a sort of affection for their wives—something like friendship, if they happen to get on well together. But I don't want that—I wouldn't have it—I would almost as soon that you hated me! Oh, Adrian, if you ever cared for anyone else as you care for me now, I think I should die!'

There was such a strange look upon her face, and she spoke with so much vehemence, that the young man was startled. 'Why, Clare,' he said, 'what has put such notions into your

head ! Care for anyone else as I care for you ! Don't you know that that is utterly impossible ?'

'All sorts of impossible things happen,' she answered, more quietly, and with a certain shamefacedness, 'and all sorts of horrid thoughts come into one's mind. But one ought not to speak them out. Please forget that I said that, Adrian.'

But he did not forget it. He remembered the speech afterwards when he was alone, and the look that had come over the girl's face as she uttered it, and he said to himself—not without reason, it may be—that he was unworthy of such love. Those few words were in some sort a revelation to him ; for he was quick at interpreting signs of character, and he perceived what he had hitherto only half suspected, that Clare's was one of those deep and strong natures which surrender themselves wholly when they surrender at all, and which will be satisfied with nothing short of complete surrender in return. Well, if it were so, there was no need for disquietude.

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove ;

nor would Clare ever have reason to complain that she did not hold the first place in his thoughts. She was not one of those unreasonable women who will quarrel even with that measure of allegiance which an artist owes to his art.

CHAPTER XII

HERIOT'S WEDDING PRESENT

THE happy summer-time stole on with scarcely a cloud, material or metaphorical, to dim its brightness. Every now and again a heavy shower would sweep in from the westward, converting the steep streets of Polruth into running water-courses for half an hour or so ; but this year the elements seemed to have entered into a conspiracy to make two lovers happy ; and day after day the sky and the sea were blue, and the rocks and islets of the coast slept in a golden haze, while Clare and Adrian wandered about together, redeating the old phrases which never suffer by repetition, while

the boys, giving up this couple as hopeless, reverted to their ordinary pastimes, and while Mrs. Irvine scoured the country in search of eligible residences.

If there was a gloomy face in the household, it was that which rose above Heriot's bowed shoulders. He had congratulated his friend, and had said all that was pretty and appropriate to Miss Irvine ; but he had not managed to conceal from either of them the misgivings which he felt with regard to this marriage, and it was but natural that they should resent his unspoken disapproval. Therefore the news of his approaching departure was not greeted with that general chorus of protest which he was accustomed to hear annually from his hospitable friends at Cardrew. Mrs. Irvine, however, was loud in her reproaches.

'You have never given us less than a month before,' she exclaimed, 'and it is too bad of you to run away like this, just when I am in need of somebody to consult with. I know you think me a silly old woman for wanting to keep Clare near us ; but that is no reason why you should deprive me of the benefit of your advice now that the thing is decided upon ; and I am sure no one who has not had to look about for houses can have any idea of how difficult it is to find what you want. As for those two, I can't move them to take the slightest interest in the matter. They say that anything with four walls and a roof will do, and that they are quite content to leave it to me—which is so absurd ; because it is they, not I, who will have to live in the house. Well, I must do the best I can. I suppose we shall see no more of you now until next summer.'

'Oh, you haven't quite seen the last of me yet,' answered Heriot, with a laugh. 'I have been asked to stay with the St. Austells, and I dare say we can contrive one or two meetings before I leave Cornwall. So that the blow will be softened.'

He did not add that the spare room at Cardrew might very possibly be coveted by one who had a better right than he to occupy it ; although this was one of the reasons which had led him to hasten his leave-taking.

Adrian made no comment upon the subject, one way or the other ; but that evening, when he had bidden the family good-night and was setting off for his lodgings, Heriot surprised him a little by saying, 'I think I'll just walk down with you, Adrian, and smoke a pipe before I go to bed.'

'All right,' answered the young man. 'Come along, and I'll give you a whisky-and-soda, or whatever it is that your

doctor allows you to drink.' But he was not very much delighted; for he thought, 'Now I'm in for another lecture;' and it seemed to him that it was rather too late in the day to deliver or listen to lectures.

However, Heriot did not seem to have very much to say, after all. He walked almost in silence from the house to the village, and afterwards, at Vidal's lodgings, sat smoking for half an hour with a preoccupied air, and replying in monosyllables to the remarks addressed to him. It was only when he had risen to go that he came to the point.

'You are to be married some time in the autumn, I suppose,' he said, somewhat brusquely.

'I believe so. Nothing is absolutely settled yet.'

'Yes;—well, I wanted to say that I'm afraid I shan't be able to come to the wedding.'

'Why, my dear fellow,' exclaimed Adrian, 'I was counting upon you to do best man.'

'Ah, I had the vanity to imagine that perhaps you might honour me so far; and that is why I thought I had better beg you at once to ask somebody else. I am sure you won't accuse me of unfriendliness; but, you see, my health is so uncertain—and in the autumn I generally have to move south—and—and altogether, I am afraid I shall have to content myself with being with you in the spirit when the day comes.'

He spoke with some hesitation and embarrassment; and Vidal, perceiving that these excuses were not genuine, was the least bit in the world offended. But he answered good-humouredly enough, 'Just as you think best, old chap. We shall all miss you, of course; but if you're in Egypt, you can't be in Cornwall, that's certain.'

'No; just so—that's it, you see,' said Heriot; 'and if I am not quite as far off as Egypt, I may very likely be on my way there: so that it would be best not to reckon upon me. And, Adrian,' he added, producing an envelope from his pocket, and still speaking in the same flurried, uncertain manner, 'I thought I would take this opportunity of giving you my wedding present. I have ventured to put it in the coarse and practical form of a cheque; because one wishes one's friends to buy what they will like, and how am I to know what would please a young lady?'

Adrian took the envelope, and mumbled his thanks after the usual fashion. But it appeared that Heriot had still something to add. 'It's—it's for a rather larger amount than

one generally gives as a wedding present,' he said ; 'but I hope you won't mind that, and that you'll take it as it is meant. You know, I have more money than I can spend, and it occurred to me that furnishing and setting up house and all that— Besides which, I have my doubts about this Cornish establishment. I think it will have to be London, most likely, after all ; and then, perhaps, a few extra tables and chairs, you know, might come in useful.'

'I couldn't accept more than a certain amount, Heriot,' said Vidal, somewhat alarmed by this incoherent explanation.

'Well, it isn't more than a certain amount,' returned Heriot sharply. 'Don't be silly ; I'm not offering you a fortune. Now good-night ; and may you never need a friend to help you out of trouble to the end of your days. But if you ever should, you know where to apply.'

So the two men shook hands, and Heriot made for the door. But on the threshold he halted again irresolutely. 'Look here, Adrian,' he said ; 'I don't want to preach, but the old Adam is strong in me, and I must say one word. You are going to marry a girl who has had no experience of life whatsoever. She knows nothing, literally nothing about it, and when she goes to London she will hear and see many things which she won't like. Well, you are prepared for that, no doubt ; still, it may make you impatient at the time. Don't be impatient with her, and don't let her lose faith in you. Because, although she can easily be made happy, she can also be easily made unhappy, and I don't think she can very easily forgive.'

Vidal nodded and smiled. The advice might be a little superfluous, but doubtless it was well meant. After Heriot had gone, he opened the envelope and found that it contained a cheque for 1,000*l.*

CHAPTER XIII

LADY ST. AUSTELL

By far the greatest man in the neighbourhood of Polruth was Sydney George, third Earl of St. Austell and eighth Viscount Blaise ; but his local greatness was due rather to the fact that he owned nearly the whole of the surrounding district than to

any personal qualities that he might possess ; for of these not much was known to Cornish folk. He spent but a very short time out of each year at Blaise Castle, having estates in other parts of England which he preferred ; and during that short time his tall, bony figure, his hook nose, and purple whiskers were seldom exhibited to an admiring tenantry. In London, on the other hand, as well as at Newmarket, Melton, Cowes, and other resorts of fashionable society, he was, if not great, at all events famous. All his life long he had gone in lavishly for every form of amusement which costs money ; and although he had been, upon the whole, successful on the turf, the racing stud which he still kept up in his old age must have swallowed a very much larger annual amount than it returned. He had, however, always been wealthy, and was moreover declared by those who had reason to know to be an exceedingly sharp man of business. It is probable that the sums which he lost at play during the early years of the century were not so enormous as was currently reported.

But, indeed, many reports were current respecting this old nobleman which, if looked into, might have been found to be untrue or exaggerated. Fame, when once she takes to blowing the trumpet of any individual with regard to some special quality, is apt to blow so loudly that false notes must needs come out every now and then ; and just as all witty sayings used to be attributed to Sydney Smith, and most solemn platitudes to poor Benjamin Franklin, so Lord St. Austell, having established a reputation for phenomenal wickedness, had fathered upon him many crimes of which he was, perhaps, innocent. The balance might have satisfied him ; for in truth there was hardly a vice in the exercise of which he had not shown himself an adept ; but if any unfounded accusations were brought against him, it was not he who would think of refuting or complaining of them. He was well aware that he passed for being the greatest sinner in England, and though he never boasted of his bygone iniquities, he took an intense silent delight in the name that he had earned for himself. A sceptic as to religion, and a cynic as to morality, he had devoted the whole of his long life to the one object of gratifying his personal desires, and had never stepped aside to serve a friend or to avenge himself upon a foe—neither of these ends being, in his opinion, calculated to repay the trouble of achievement. Why such a man should have been popular it would be rather hard to say ; for he

possessed no single virtue, except that of physical courage ; but that he did enjoy popularity of a certain kind is undeniable. He had been three times married. His first two wives, it was said, had succumbed to his fascinations, as a great many other people's wives had done, had married him out of pure affection, and had died broken-hearted on discovering that other people's wives interested him considerably more than his own.

The third and last Lady St. Austell had not accepted the coronet offered to her from any such motives, and was in no danger of incurring so melancholy a fate. It might have seemed like a piece of poetical justice that this old reprobate should have found himself at the end of his career linked to a partner many years younger than himself, whose flirtations were common talk ; but Lord St. Austell, as it happened, was quite cognisant of his wife's peculiarities, and didn't care a bit. She amused him ; which was more than either of her predecessors had been able to do. He took a malicious kind of pleasure in watching her, in seeing how far she would venture to go, and in condoling with her when she failed—as she occasionally did—to capture the particular admirer whom she coveted. Sometimes he succeeded in making her angry by leading her to the glass and pointing out that she was growing stout and losing her complexion—which was great fun. Sometimes, too, he frightened her ; and that was better fun still. He knew very well that she would never overstep the thin boundary-line which separates mere indiscretion from downright folly. Perhaps he would not have minded very much if she had ; but he liked to let her feel, from time to time, that he had the whip hand of her, and would crack the whip for the satisfaction of seeing her scared.

After all, he knew very little about her ; for they were seldom together. He thought her a silly sort of woman, and so, no doubt, she was ; but he had not troubled himself to examine closely into her character, nor had he any suspicion that she was in reality a philosopher of his own school. Heriot, who had been all his life acquainted with this thoroughly egotistical, yet unamiable lady, found her an even more amusing study than her husband did. If he had no very profound esteem for her, he could not help liking her ; and she, on her side, honoured him with something as nearly approaching friendship as her nature could compass. Heriot was not a man with whom it was possible to flirt ; so she had

long fallen into the habit of treating him as one outside the pale of the emotions and excitements for which she lived, and was wont to confide to him, with delightful candour, all the details of these. Her emotions were genuine ; she had learnt the trick of stimulating them. Fortunately, they were also shallow, and did not 'delve the parallels on beauty's brow,' which she dreaded more than anything else in the world. As the sense of humour was developed in her to a greater extent than is common among women, Heriot and she sometimes had an unexpected laugh together, which refreshed them both.

Almost the first thing that she said to him, after he arrived at Blaise Castle from Cardrew, was, 'You find me in the depth of despair. I don't know when in my life before I have felt so miserably low-spirited.'

'Dear me !' said Heriot. 'Has anything happened to Charley, or Jimmy, or whatever his name was ?'

'Johnny. Johnny Spencer. You know what a charming young fellow he was. Always so cheery and pleasant and—'

'And so devoted to you. But why do you speak of him in the past tense ? Is he dead ?'

Lady St. Austell sighed. 'No ; but I am sorry to say that I have had to marry him to an heiress. It has left me very much depressed, though the match was an excellent one as far as that goes, and you can easily understand how it became necessary. *He* was beginning to be so disagreeable that I felt things couldn't go on much longer as they had been doing.'

The emphasised pronoun referred to Lord St. Austell, whom her ladyship was often pleased to represent as a jealous tyrant.

'You will have to get another,' said Heriot.

'Ah, no ! I shall never be as fond of anyone again as I was of him. Why do you laugh ? I suppose you think yourself much wiser than I am because you have never chosen to advance a step beyond friendship with any woman. Well, you are wrong. You miss the greatest blessing of existence.'

'Very likely. But as Nature has treated me rather unkindly in the matter of features, and as my health won't allow me to be a marrying man, perhaps I may be consulting my peace better by letting love alone.'

'What on earth has marriage to say to the question ? Or features either, for that matter ? You might spend some very

happy hours, if you chose ; but you don't choose, because you are afraid of losing your peace. Well, I grant you that your peace would have to go for a time ; but supposing it did ! Is peace such a treasure ? If peace were all one wanted, one might as well be an old cow at once. I don't recommend you to fall in love with a girl, for girls naturally think about establishing themselves, and you are well off ; but surely among your acquaintances you might find some married woman whom you could care for.'

'Wouldn't that be rather immoral ?' asked Heriot.

'Certainly not. You are not going to call me immoral, I hope ? Now, you know how perfectly innocent all my little affairs of that kind have been. Disinterested too—as I have proved by my behaviour in Johnny Spencer's case. I have never tried to keep myself from indulging in a Platonic love for anyone towards whom I have felt drawn, and I never will. Do you think that does them or me any harm ? Harm !—why, it does us the greatest possible good. It brings out all the noblest qualities of our characters ; it enables us to forget the dreary boredom of everyday life ; and, for my own part, even if the individual doesn't happen to care for me, I am always glad to have the power of feeling such a pure and delightful emotion.'

'In other words, it is the emotion that you love, and not the individual.'

'Well, I love the individual for giving me the emotion. Believe me, there is nothing else in life that is worth the trouble. I have tried most things, so I can speak with some authority. Do you know, I remind myself very much of a character in a novel that I was reading the other day, called "Society," or some such name. Have you seen it ?'

'If you mean "Satiety," answered Heriot, 'it is by a friend of mine, a man named Vidal, who is in Cornwall at this moment.'

'You don't say so !' cried Lady St. Austell, with quickened interest. 'Is he young ? Is he good-looking ? Is he the sort of person whom one could ask to one's house ?'

'He is young, he is good-looking, and he is the sort of person who would be calculated to reflect credit upon his hostess,' replied Heriot gravely. 'Also he is engaged to be married. His future wife is the only daughter of my friends the Irvines.'

'I should like to meet him all the same,' said Lady St

Austell pensively. ‘So he is going to marry that pretty Miss Irvine, is he? He might amuse me. Do you think he would amuse me?’

‘I dare say he would,’ answered Heriot; ‘only, as he is engaged——’

‘Yes, yes, I know; don’t be absurd. We will have the Irvines to dinner one day next week. I don’t much like the old lady, because she always bothers one so for subscriptions, but we really ought to show them some civility. Now I come to think of it, I believe we haven’t asked them to dinner for two years.’

The result of this conversation was that Mrs. Irvine received a friendly note the next morning, in which Lady St. Austell congratulated her upon her daughter’s approaching marriage, and begged her, as well as Mr. and Miss Irvine, to ‘join a few friends at dinner’ on the following Thursday. ‘And we shall be so glad,’ continued the writer, ‘if you can persuade Mr. Vidal to come with you. Please tell him that he needs no introduction to me, for I already know him through his very clever book, which I have read with the greatest interest.’

‘Now this is most fortunate!’ exclaimed Mrs. Irvine, after reading the above sentences aloud and laying down the note upon the breakfast-table. ‘I was just wondering how I could manage to get hold of Lord St. Austell, and put in a word for those poor fishermen. I am a little bit afraid of him, I confess; but it would never do to let such an opportunity slip. Of course we must accept. You will come, won’t you?’ she added, turning to Vidal, who was now staying in the house.

‘Oh, certainly,’ he answered. He had not been insensible to Lady St. Austell’s flattering reference to himself, and was rather surprised when Clare confided to him afterwards that she had hoped he would decline.

‘Why? Would you prefer to be without my company?’ he asked, smiling.

‘You need not ask that question,’ she replied; ‘but don’t you think it was rather impertinent of her to invite you in that way? It sounded as if—as if——’

‘As if what?’

‘Well, as if she only wanted you to come because you had written a book that amused her.’

Vidal laughed. ‘But, do you know,’ he said, ‘I don’t find

that an insulting reason. Of course, you and I are aware that my acquaintance is an inestimable boon in itself ; but we can't expect Lady St. Austell to have discovered that, since she has never been fortunate enough to see me. If reading my book has given her a desire to see me, why shouldn't she say so ?'

'I am sure you won't like her,' said Clare. 'She is a horrid old thing, who makes herself up with powder and paint, and has very disagreeable, artificial sort of manners. Even Mr. Heriot, who never will say a word against any of his friends, admits that she is bad style.'

However, Vidal was unable to admit the justice of this criticism when he found himself face to face with the subject of it. The lady who received him at Blaise Castle was certainly not old, nor—so far as could be seen in the dim light—was she painted ; and if her manner was artificial, it was far from being disagreeable. She had a vivacious little face, with bright eyes, a retroussé nose, and very red lips. It was not exactly pretty, but it was decidedly attractive. Her figure had probably been prettier some years back : it was now somewhat too full for beauty.

These details he noted as he followed the Irvines into a spacious room, full of people. Lady St. Austell did not detain him, having other guests to welcome, and being more alive than her husband was to the advisability of keeping upon good terms with the squirearchy. The 'few friends' of whom she had spoken in her note of invitation in reality comprised every decent person who dwelt within a twelve-mile radius of the Castle, and it was easy to foresee that the impending dinner would be as long and dull as such overgrown entertainments always are. Vidal, who at this particular period of his life had eyes for only one person, was not interested in the assemblage, and found the conversation of the lady whom he subsequently took into the dining-room extremely tedious. The same causes which prevented him from doing justice to the company interfered with his appreciation of the dinner, which was nevertheless an excellent one ; for Lord St. Austell was not the man to put up with indifferent cooking.

'I'll tell you what to eat,' Vidal heard him saying confidentially to the stout dowager who sat on his right hand. 'Put yourself into my hands, and you needn't be afraid of taking anything that will disagree with you. I suppose you

are like me, and suffer from a fit of gout every now and then, don't you? You look as if you did.'

Lord St. Austell had a peculiarly rude way of saying rude things when he was in a bad humour, and country dinner parties always put him in a bad humour. His neighbours were very much afraid of him, and indeed he looked a sufficiently terrible old man, sitting there, at the end of that long vista of fruit and flowers and priceless china, like a living *memento mori* in the midst of so much luxury. His pallid visage, his unnaturally black whiskers, the eye-glass which gleamed when the light fell upon it, and the long teeth which gleamed always, preached as pithy a sermon and diffused as effective a chill around him as any mummy at an Egyptian feast could have done. When he spoke (he had a high-pitched, ringing voice), everybody stopped talking and quaked; because it was impossible to tell what dreadful thing he might not be going to say; and if there was an episode in your past life which you desired to bury in oblivion, you might be pretty sure that Lord St. Austell had heard about it, and would not neglect a chance of referring to it.

At the other extremity of the table things were more cheerful. Of Lady St. Austell no one had need to be frightened; and although she may have been quite as much bored as her husband, she did not avenge her wrongs, as he usually did, upon the first person who came to hand. Round about her, therefore, there was a brisk cackle of voices and laughter which spread to a certain distance. Clare, sitting about midway between the gaiety and the gloom, had for neighbour a young man who informed her that he was staying in the house and hardly knew a soul at the table. He appeared anxious to correct his ignorance—having, perhaps, some difficulty in finding topics likely to interest a country-bred maiden—and she enlightened him as to the names and residences of his fellow-guests, which pretty well exhausted all that there was to be said about them. But when he inquired who the fair-haired man opposite was, she answered, colouring slightly, and not without a certain intonation of pride, 'That is Mr. Vidal.'

'You speak as if you were the show man of the district,' remarked her questioner.

'He does not live here,' replied Clare. 'He is *the* Mr. Vidal, you know.' Indeed, she supposed that every person

of ordinary education must have heard of this celebrated author.

'Oh yes,' said her neighbour vaguely, 'very stupid of me ; but somehow that doesn't seem to convey much idea to my mind. Who is The Vidal when he's at home ?'

'He is the Mr. Vidal who writes. But perhaps you don't read books,' said Clare, with a touch of disdain.

'Well, not very much. I read the papers ; and as I am an idle man, that is almost all I can find time for. What is Mr. Vidal's line ? Science, history, travels, or poetry ? Poetry, I should think, by the look of him.'

'He writes novels,' answered Clare. 'That is, he has written one ; but he has been a contributor to the best magazines for some time, I believe.'

'Oh, novels ? Then I may make acquaintance with his productions some day. I like a good novel—only it must be a good one. Whyte-Melville's, for instance : Whyte-Melville knew what he was writing about. Some of these authors—upon my word, I can't think where they find the cheek to publish their rubbish ! Why, only the other day, as I was coming down here, I bought a novel to read in the train, and in the very first chapter I came to something about pheasant-shooting in September. Well, I thought perhaps that was only a slip of the pen. I said to myself, "Don't let's be too hard on the poor chap," and I read on. But, if you'll believe me, I hadn't got through a dozen pages before I came to a yachting scene where the hero is represented as beating up a narrow channel against the wind, and singing out to his skipper to gybe ! Well, now, you know, I do call that just a little bit too bad. I don't pretend to criticise grammar or style ; but it does seem to me that a man ought to have some elementary knowledge of his subjects before he sits down to write a book.'

'I don't think Mr. Vidal makes such mistakes,' said Clare.

'Doesn't he ? You seem to take a great interest in him. Well, I dare say he's a clever fellow, and he's good-looking enough, anyhow. I suppose that is why our revered hostess has been making eyes at him ever since we sat down.'

The poor man meant no harm. He could not tell that his fair neighbour was engaged to Mr. Vidal, and he was a good deal taken aback when she turned upon him with sudden fierceness, exclaiming, 'Making eyes at him ! I can't believe that even she would be so—so disgusting as that ! If you are

a friend of hers, you ought not to say such things about her.'

Clare's own eyes were flashing, and her cheeks had become pink. Her interlocutor, who began to have an inkling of the state of affairs, could not help answering maliciously, 'As I am a friend of hers I know her little ways, and I can assure you that she is a most dangerous person. When she makes eyes at a man, it is generally all up with him. But you need not feel alarmed about Mr. Vidal. He doesn't know what an impression he has produced ; he hasn't even glanced at her. Perhaps he has found some one more agreeable to look at.'

Clare perceived that she had made herself ridiculous, and was proportionately ashamed ; but, although she immediately changed the subject, she did not succeed in banishing it from her mind. During the rest of the dinner she was preoccupied and uneasy, and afterwards in the drawing-room, when she saw Lady St. Austell bearing down upon Adrian, she felt that painful constriction of the heart which only a swift pang of jealousy can produce.

The law of our being, which throws us poor mortals upon the world with certain hereditary tendencies, infirmities, defects, and so on, and leaves us to make the best we can of the imbroglio, had not spared Clare Irvine any more than it has spared the humble writer and the respected reader of these words. Like the rest of us, she was imperfect, and it must be confessed that the sweetness of her disposition was somewhat marred by what, after all, is not so much a vice as a misfortune. Jealousy is no more to be fought against than the toothache—the utmost that can be accomplished in the case of either malady is to conceal it ; but what adds bitterness to the former is that those who suffer from it are as often as not aware that their sufferings are wholly irrational. Nothing, for example, could have been more absurd upon the face of it than that Clare should object to see a man who adored her conversing for a matter of ten minutes with a stout lady whose charms were on the wane, and whom he might very probably not encounter a second time in the course of his life Yet she did object ; and, indeed, it was perhaps just as well that she could not overhear the dialogue which was taking place at the end of that long and dimly-lighted room.

'Mr. Vidal,' Lady St. Austell began, 'I have a crow to pluck with you. I want to know what you mean by putting me into a book.'

'I don't think I need defend myself against that accusation, Lady St. Austell,' answered Vidal ; though he knew what she meant, and was secretly pleased that the fidelity of his sketch should have been recognised. 'How could I have written about you when I have never had the happiness of meeting you until this evening ?'

'You must have heard of me, then—from Mr. Heriot, perhaps. Oh, I assure you I know myself when I see my face in the glass ; I have no illusions. The lady in your novel is a portrait of me, and a very unflattering portrait too. Well, I will forgive you if you will make haste and write another book as amusing. But now, tell me, why do you attack women of the world with such acrimony ? What have we done to you that you should be so severe upon us ?'

'I dare say your shoulders are broad enough to bear my attacks,' answered Vidal, smiling, and then bethought himself that he might have hit upon a happier phrase ; for, in truth, Lady St. Austell's shoulders had lost the gracefulness of proportion that they had once possessed.

But she went on, without heeding him, ' You quarrel with our ways of killing time ; but you don't seem to consider that time must be killed somehow, and that we haven't so many means of doing that as you have. I suppose you are like all men : you believe that the world was created for you, and that we were only put into it as an afterthought.'

'The Book of Genesis lends some support to that theory,' observed Vidal. 'At the same time, I should be an ardent upholder of women's rights if I could only find out exactly what they were. What I do venture to contend for is that both men and women might find something better to do with time than to kill it.'

'Ah, yes ; that has been put into rhyme, hasn't it ? Teach the orphan boy to read, and teach the orphan girl to sew, &c., &c. Praiseworthy, but not exciting ; and excitement is what we require. You take care to have plenty of it for yourselves, I notice ; only you can't admit that your wives and daughters may have the same cravings that you have. What a fortunate thing it is that most of you have a blind faith in your own wives and daughters, and that, unless they are very stupid indeed, they can always manage to amuse themselves without letting you into their secrets ! How is it that you don't understand that human nature is human nature all the world over ?'

'All women are not alike,' remarked Vidal.

'They are more alike than you think for, perhaps. Just now, I know, there is one woman whom you consider immeasurably superior to the rest of us, and I don't wonder at that. She is very pretty, and probably very charming too, when you know her. Tell me about her; I like listening to lovers' rhapsodies.'

It may be taken for granted that Lady St. Austell did not really enjoy a form of conversation which has never yet been found enjoyable by man or woman; but she spoke with a certain appearance of sincerity, and drew rather nearer to her companion, smiling up into his face and throwing back her head, with a slight inclination to one side, in a way that she had. Her closed fan just touched his coat-sleeve; the diamonds in her hair and about her neck dazzled the eyes of the young man, who, if the truth must be told, was a little bit flattered at having been singled out for so conspicuous a share of his hostess's attentions. He did not rhapsodise, as he had been requested to do, but he tried to be agreeable and to say some clever things; and possibly he succeeded. At any rate, the colloquy lasted for some time; and Clare, watching it all, felt her soul disquieted within her.

Out of the four people whom the Irvines' carriage bore away into the night, shortly afterwards, one was silent and depressed, one was sleepy, and two were highly elated.

'I have got ten pounds out of him,' Mrs. Irvine was saying triumphantly. 'It isn't handsome, considering what his income is; but with his name to head my list I shall do tolerably well, I hope, and really he was not nearly as uncivil as I expected him to be. Lady St. Austell was most friendly. She said such nice things about you both, and she is coming over to luncheon some day soon. You and she have arranged it all, have you not, Adrian?'

'She told me she was anxious to explore Polruth,' answered Vidal. 'It seems that she has seen very little of her husband's property in these parts, and she wanted to know whether I would show her all the objects of interest; but I said I thought Clare was more capable of undertaking that task than I.'

'If Lady St. Austell discovers any objects of interest in Polruth, it is certain that I shall not be one of them,' observed Clare; but Adrian did not notice the dryness of her intonation.

'The chief object of interest to Lady St. Austell, in Polruth, or elsewhere, will always be Lady St. Austell,' he rejoined, laughing; 'but I confess that she is an object of interest to me too. I found her very entertaining, and there is an absence of humbug about her which rises almost to the level of a virtue.'

'I have always thought that there was a great deal that was nice in her,' said good-natured Mrs. Irvine; 'and although she has not been particularly neighbourly until now, I shall be very glad if she likes to begin.'

But in this expression of kindly feeling Mrs. Irvine was not seconded by her daughter.

CHAPTER XIV

ANGLING

IF Clare was foolish enough to have been jealous of Lady St. Austell, on account of what she considered the flirtation that had taken place between that frivolous lady and Adrian, she was at least not so unjust as to impute any blame to the latter. Following the custom of her sex, she blamed the woman, and felt no anger against her lover for having caused her to pass some unhappy hours. But indeed she blamed nobody very long; nor was it possible that she should entertain any serious misgivings as to Adrian's constancy. He, for his part, was far too deeply in love to waste many thoughts upon Lady St. Austell. He made no reference to her on the following day; and before twenty-four hours were over, she and her projected visit to Polruth had passed entirely out of his mind.

It so chanced, however, that Lady St. Austell had not forgotten Mr. Vidal. She had taken a fancy to the young author, partly because she had made up her mind beforehand to like him, partly because he was handsome, and partly also because he was neither in love with her nor likely to become so. She had filled her house with a set of people who bored her, and she complained bitterly to Heriot that she didn't know how to get through the day.

'Very seldom before have I felt so dejected,' she said. 'I have an idea that it might do me some good to drive over to

Cardrew and see your friend Mr. Vidal. You shall come with me, and keep the Irvine family engaged in conversation while I take him out for a walk. Would you mind ?'

'Not in the least,' answered Heriot ; 'but it seems just possible that Miss Irvine might mind, and I am not sure that Vidal himself would enjoy the walk as much as he ought to do. Hadn't you better wait until he is married ? You will find him much more diverting company then.'

'But I want to be diverted now,' objected Lady St. Austell. 'His wedding won't take place before next Wednesday, I presume, and on that day, I am thankful to say, we go to Scotland. If you really think the girl would be so absurd as to dislike my taking her *fiancé* out for a walk, I won't do it. Or she can accompany us if she chooses. My own belief is that they will all be rather annoyed if I don't pay them a visit; because I promised that I would, and you know how huffy people who live in remote places always are when one breaks an engagement.'

'I would undertake to make your peace with them,' said Heriot drily.

'Well, the fact is that I have just sent a note to Mrs. Irvine, asking her if she will have me to luncheon to-morrow. I told her I should bring you with me ; so I am afraid we can't get out of it now.'

Heriot smiled. He had noticed Clare Irvine's face on the night of the dinner party, and had been sorry for what he had seen there. It was easy enough to forecast the future of such a woman ; easy enough to guess what inevitable troubles must be in store for her ; and impossible—at least to this old and faithful friend—not to deplore them in advance. But Lady St. Austell was scarcely a person to be dreaded. Vidal was not in her world, and her memory of the absent was not very retentive. Moreover, she was certain to have picked up some unattached admirer before she could meet him again.

It was, therefore, with tolerable equanimity, though without much hope of spending a pleasant day, that Heriot heard, on the morrow, of the receipt of a favourable reply from Mrs. Irvine, and seated himself beside his hostess in the mail phæeton which was to convey them to Cardrew. Lady St. Austell, who drove as fast as she talked—which is saying a good deal—accomplished the distance in excellent time, and took the whole burden of the conversation upon herself. When the slate roofs and the pale blue smoke-wreaths of Polruth came in sight, she declared that she already felt better.

'It is the atmosphere of Blaise that weighs me down so,' said she. 'Everybody is dull there—even you, if you will excuse my saying so. I observe that you are much more cheerful when you are with the Irvines than you are with us. They shall cheer you up this afternoon; and if only Mr. Vidal can manage to do as much for me, I shall be eternally grateful to him.'

But perhaps Mr. Vidal was not anxious to possess that claim upon Lady St. Austell's gratitude; for hardly had Mrs. Irvine finished welcoming her guests when she made an announcement regarding him which amused one of them a good deal more than it did the other.

'Two of our party have deserted us,' the unsuspecting lady said. 'Clare and Adrian—Mr. Vidal, you know. Well, of course that is very natural, and one is glad that they should enjoy themselves together—especially as the boys tease them so whenever they are within reach. To-day they have taken their lunch with them, and I believe they are going to fish the trout-stream up from the sea; though whether they will catch anything is another matter. But I dare say they won't mind, and Adrian said he was sure they wouldn't be missed.'

Heriot chuckled in his beard; but if he expected Lady St. Austell to exhibit any signs of mortification, he was disappointed. Lady St. Austell had her countenance well under command, and was also a woman of considerable readiness.

'Mr. Vidal is too modest,' she answered. 'I shall miss both him and your daughter very much; but I don't mean to go away without seeing them. I have never caught a trout in my life, and I adore new sensations. Mr. Irvine,' she added, bringing an engaging smile to bear upon Jack, 'will you be good-natured enough to take charge of an ignorant woman this afternoon, and show her how to throw a fly? Then we might all walk up the stream together.'

'With the greatest of pleasure, Lady St. Austell,' answered Jack; 'only you can't throw a fly into that stream, because it is so overgrown. However, if you will condescend to a grub, I'll do my best to show you some sport. It's rather rough walking, though; I don't know whether you mind that.'

Lady St. Austell declared, quite truthfully, that she minded nothing that gave her amusement; and added, with a shade less of truth, that she felt sure of having that, since Mr. Irvine had so kindly consented to be troubled with her.

This speech put Jack, who was not much accustomed to be

sought after by fascinating countesses, upon excellent terms with himself, and caused him inwardly to resolve that Lady St. Austell should have the use of his own rod instead of Bob's, which, in view of probable contingencies, he had originally destined for her. During luncheon he talked a good deal, and flattered himself that he displayed all the graceful ease of a man of the world, while the lady for whose sake this brilliancy of dialogue was being displayed listened with every appearance of interest.

Whatever may have been the impression that Jack produced upon her, it is certain that she produced a most favourable one, not only upon him, but upon all the other members of his family. No one could have been more agreeable ; and she found an opportunity of saying something pleasant to everybody—having, indeed, long ago discovered that it is scarcely more difficult, and a great deal wiser, to make friends than enemies.

No sooner was she out of the dining-room than she expressed her intention of proceeding to the stream forthwith. 'No, my dear Mrs. Irvine, you must not think of coming with me in this heat. I couldn't hear of such a thing—it would make me quite miserable! No ; you shall sit here quietly and talk to Mr. Heriot, who, I know, has heaps of things to say to you ; and Mr. Jack—may I call you Mr. Jack ? It saves confusion, doesn't it ?—Mr. Jack will look after me.'

So presently this resolute lady, who was appropriately equipped for fishing in a pair of the thinnest French boots and a charming costume of pale pink cambric, trimmed with yards of lace, was seen tripping across the slopes of the park with her chosen protector by her side ; and Heriot, watching them from the window, burst into an abrupt laugh, which he declined to explain when called upon to do so.

In the meantime Adrian and Clare were having a perfectly happy time of it together. They were not catching many fish, it is true ; but then it had not been for the sake of catching fish that they had absented themselves. When Lady St. Austell's note had arrived, Clare had, indeed, exclaimed, 'Oh, what a bore ! Now we shall not be able to try the trout-stream ;' but she had been rather surprised by the promptitude with which Vidal had returned, 'Why not ? It would be a capital excuse for getting out of her way, and we aren't bound to receive your mother's guests.' She had not supposed that he would have been anxious to get out of Lady St. Aus-

tell's way ; but in truth he would, at that time, have been anxious to get out of the way of anybody who had threatened to deprive him for a few hours of the only society for which he cared. So these two went off together in the best of spirits, and, starting from the sea, progressed slowly upwards, conscientiously fishing every pool, and only allowing themselves a respite of perhaps an hour and a half in which to consume the sandwiches that they had carried out with them.

The stream—which dropped in a succession of tiny cascades and miniature rapids from the heights of Cardrew to the shore—was of tolerably respectable volume when swelled by the winter rains, but after so dry a summer as this had been, was reduced to the dimensions of a mere rivulet. To an enthusiastic angler, therefore, it would have seemed to leave much to be desired ; but, on the other hand, a pair of lovers might very well be content to clamber up its mossy banks, to rest awhile under the thick shade of the trees which bordered it, or to seat themselves upon one of the overhanging boulders beneath which the little trout congregated. Adrian and Clare hooked three of these, and threw them back again to grow larger ; but as the afternoon went on, they got no more bites, and agreed at last that it was absurd to expect any fish to look at a grub in such bright weather.

This point being decided, they felt entitled to take their rods to pieces and enjoy themselves after a less laborious fashion. Sitting under the overarching boughs, through which stray shafts of sunlight flickered, sometimes interchanging remarks which it would be cruel to transfer to the hard black and white of a printed page, and sometimes listening in contented silence to the babble of the brook and to all those subdued stirrings and rustlings which make the charm of the woods in summer-time, they were wholly oblivious of the existence of Lady St. Austell, who was nevertheless drawing nearer to them every moment, and brushing her way through the under-growth with a recklessness that might have brought a sardonic smile to the lips of her dressmaker.

Her ladyship very soon had enough of Jack, and paid no heed to his entreaties that she would remain among the higher pools, and spare herself so much needless exertion. ‘If we go on much farther we shall come upon those two idiots,’ he said discontentedly, ‘and then it will be all up with our chance. They are sure to have gone splashing about and scaring the

fish, and besides, there's no use in trying places that have been tried all day.'

But Lady St. Austell, though good-humoured, was inexorable. 'Sometimes the least likeliest place is more likelier than the most likeliest,' said she, quoting from an old number of *Punch*. 'We will go on till we find the two idiots, as you politely call them, and then we can begin to retrace our steps.'

And find them she did. She found them, indeed, so suddenly that they started a couple of yards apart with great haste, and looked exceedingly red and foolish. The little lady in the pink dress, who stood smiling down upon them, with her rod in her hand, was not at all put out of countenance.

'See how indiscreet I am !' she cried. 'Your brother has been imploring me not to thrust my company upon you; but I delight in doing the things that I ought not to do, and I really think you both deserve some punishment for running away from me after promising to show me all the beauties of Polruth. Mr. Vidal, I am glad to see that you look ashamed of yourself. Never mind ! I know you are a privileged person just now. I only wanted to demonstrate to you that you can't escape me by concealing yourself in a thicket, and having done that I will take myself off.'

But, of course, Lady St. Austell could not be allowed to depart in this way. The delinquents made such apologies as seemed necessary, and one of them was more eager to clear himself of the charge of having run away than perhaps he need have been. It is always disagreeable to be caught with your arm round a lady's waist. However beautiful and refined that lady may happen to be, and however legitimate may be the attitude, there is an apparent vulgarity about it which is both distressing and humiliating. Vidal thought he had better try to efface the recollection of what she had seen from the intruder's mind ; and it was with this pardonable object that he set to work to divert Lady St. Austell, and presently offered to show her a spot whence she might drop her line with some prospect of success. It was not at all his intention to walk away with her, and leave Clare and Jack behind ; yet that was the result of his unfortunate proposition, which was at once accepted.

'I told Mrs. Irvine that I was going to catch trout,' Lady St. Austell remarked, 'and I suppose it is my duty to catch one if I can. I haven't the most distant idea of how to set about it ; but I will try to be a docile pupil.'

It took Vidal some five minutes to conduct his pupil to her post and to bait her hook, and during these five minutes the two remaining members of the party thought fit to disappear. When Vidal noticed their absence, he began to wish that he had been a little less precipitate in offering his services ; but he could not very well shout after them, and any regrets that may have been visible upon his face were at once banished thence by a remark of his companion's, who had been watching him with much amusement.

'I hope I haven't got you into a scrape,' she said. 'I really didn't mean to take you away from Miss Irvine. Will she be very angry with you ?'

'Of course not,' replied Vidal, who did not much like the question. 'Why should she be ?'

'Oh, there is no reason why she should be ; but girls are apt to be exacting. Perhaps you think other people are rather exacting too, without so good an excuse. That is only too true, I am afraid ; still, I don't see how I *could* have sat and talked to Mrs. Irvine all the afternoon. Please overlook the offence for this once, and it shall not be repeated.'

Vidal said what nobody could have helped saying in answer to such a speech, and said it in all sincerity. For choice, he would rather not have been interrupted ; but since the interruption had taken place, he did not mind it much. It was a flattering thought that Lady St. Austell should have torn an exquisite gown to shreds for the pleasure of seeing him ; and one may find a woman very pleasant company without having the faintest disposition to flirt with her. Nor did she say a word to him that might not have been spoken in the presence of a dozen witnesses. Every now and again she threw him a languishing look ; but that was only her way—she would have done the same thing, from mere force of habit, if she had been talking to her own grandfather—and all the time she kept dropping her line into the water with a splash that ought to have been enough to terrify any fish.

It has, however, been observed before now by many a patient angler, as well as by toilers in other fields, that people who know nothing at all of what they are about often meet with a success beyond their deserts ; and so it proved in Lady St. Austell's case. All of a sudden, some reckless denizen of the pool took it into his head to swallow the bait held out to him, and the consequence was what might have been anticipated.

'Good gracious !' she exclaimed, 'I have caught a whale ! What am I to do ?'

The top joint of her rod was something less than a semi-circle ; the fish had dashed beneath a boulder, and a catastrophe appeared imminent. 'Give him line!—give him line!' shouted Vidal excitedly; 'you've got a big one.'

But, alas ! she had not got him at all. Disregarding her instructions, she jerked her rod upwards, and immediately one-half of her line was entangled in the branches overhead, while the remainder was secured as a permanent possession by the trout.

It is impossible for anyone to see a fellow-creature behave in that way without some passing feeling of indignation. 'Why didn't you listen to me ?' exclaimed Vidal reproachfully. 'Surely you couldn't have thought you were going to land a fish by main force ?'

'I thought he was going to pull me into the water,' answered Lady St. Austell, who was not at all disconcerted by her failure ; 'and I didn't wish to be put to such discomfort by a wretched little trout. How absurd it is of people to make fishing-tackle of such flimsy material ! With a good stout pole and some strong twine I could have dragged him out easily. I am sorry about the line. I suppose that poor youth will be very much annoyed and say it was all my fault, won't he ?'

'Oh, that's nothing,' answered Vidal ; 'I can put on another line for you in a minute or two. The sad thing is that you should have let a splendid opportunity slip.'

Lady St. Austell laughed, not feeling the situation to be a sad one. She sat down, clasping her hands round her knees, and watched the young man while he produced line and gut from his pocket and began tying them with deft fingers. How handsome and well-built he was ! And how admirably his loose shooting-coat, knickerbockers, and deer-stalking cap became him ! Lady St. Austell worshipped youth—she would have given all her jewels to be ten or fifteen years younger herself—and as she contemplated Clare Irvine's affianced husband, it occurred to her that it would be very pleasant to be Clare Irvine. To be young again ; to be in love—*really* in love again ; to be loved in return, and to believe that such things can endure ! Oh sweet dreams of bygone days ! Oh happy ignorance and innocence ! Oh buttercups and daisies ! Lady St. Austell was so affected by the pathos of her thoughts

that she sighed aloud, and Vidal, glancing up, asked her if she was tired.

'I am, rather,' she replied; 'I don't think I'll fish any more. Come and sit down here, and we will talk for a few minutes instead. Do you know that you ought to be a perfectly happy man?'

'I believe I am,' said Vidal, with a slight laugh.

'I suppose so. I wish, for your sake, that you could go on being as happy all your life; only that sort of happiness can't last, unfortunately. I never can remember poetry; but I dare say you know the whole of that dismal little ditty about the impossibility of keeping love from dying in the knot there's no untying.'

'I know the poem, but I am not bound to believe in the sentiment,' answered Vidal, smiling.

'Ah, you must believe in it. You couldn't write as you do unless you had found out that much. Still, I grant you that some married couples are happy after a fashion. They must not see too much of one another; that is the chief thing. What is this nonsense Mr. Heriot tells me about your taking a house down in the wilds of Cornwall? Be advised by me, and don't attempt impossibilities. London is the only place for you to live in, and you know that as well as I do.'

'It isn't exactly a matter of choice. We have to consider ways and means——'

'Rubbish!' interrupted Lady St. Austell. 'You can live as cheaply in London as anywhere, if you don't insist upon settling in a fashionable quarter. Take a pretty little house in Brompton or Bayswater, and when we come up in the spring, you must bring you wife to see me, and I will introduce her to some nice people, and try to make things cheery for her.'

'You are very kind,' said Vidal.

'I really am—to people whom I like,' returned Lady St. Austell naively; I have been often told so. What distresses me is that I am not always allowed to see as much of my friends as I could wish.'

This statement led her to speak of her own conjugal relations, which she did with the utmost frankness and good-humour, to her hearer's great amusement. Vidal was told all about Johnny Spencer, and also about many of Johnny's predecessors; his informant did not attempt to disguise either her own fickleness or that of her admirers, and interspersed

her narrative with such quaint reflections that he shook from head to foot with suppressed laughter, until she noticed his merriment, and begged him not to suppress it any longer. ‘It is so much better to laugh than to cry, and so much better to do either than to be bored,’ she said.

Whatever Lady St. Austell might be, she was certainly not a bore. Vidal was so much tickled by her observations that he did not notice how late it was getting ; and it was she who concluded the interview by exclaiming suddenly that she had not a minute to lose. ‘I have enjoyed my day very much,’ she was so kind as to say ; ‘and I am convinced that you and I should become great friends if we saw more of each other. Now, mind, you are to be sure to call upon me when we come to London ; otherwise I may have forgotten about you by that time. You won’t think me rude for saying so ; but one meets such a number of people, and I have no memory. So do look me up—you needn’t bring your wife the first time, if she chooses to stand upon ceremony—and you will be most welcome.’

She repeated this amicable invitation by-and-by in the drawing-room, where Clare was sitting with the rest of the family. ‘I have been telling Mr. Vidal that I hope to see you both in London next spring ; and if you will treat me like an old friend and neighbour, and call upon me without waiting for a formal first visit, I shall think it so kind of you.’

‘Thank you very much,’ answered Clare, rather coldly ; ‘but we are not at all likely to be in London next spring.’

‘Oh yes, you are,’ returned Lady St. Austell ; ‘you are not at all likely to be anywhere else. You can’t live in the country all the year round. Mr. Vidal owes it to his readers to study society, and we owe it to ourselves to make society pleasant for him.’

She nodded amiably, and went round the room, making her adieux : she was in too great a hurry to notice Clare’s grave face and chilling manner. But after she and Heriot had driven away, somebody else was made unpleasantly aware of Miss Irvine’s displeasure.

‘Thanks, but I don’t think I much care to hear about it,’ Clare said, when Vidal, in the innocence of his heart, proposed to relate to her all that had passed between him and their departed guest. She was standing just outside one of the open French windows, and she looked away as she spoke.

‘She really was great fun,’ Vidal went on, a little doubt-

fully, being aware that Clare did not like Lady St. Austell, but suspecting no special reason for such dislike.

'Yes? I believe a good many people think so,' remarked Clare, moving away; and there was that in her tone which made it absolutely necessary to follow her and ask whether anything was the matter.

'Nothing whatever,' she replied, with her head in the air.

Vidal of course knew what that meant, and it vexed him more than it might have done an older man. That the woman whom you love should resent your disappearing into a wood for the best part of an hour with another woman is neither a very unnatural nor a very offensive thing; but to Vidal it seemed evidence of a distrust so absurd as to be positively alarming. If this was done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry?

'Clare,' he said gravely, after an interval of silence, during which they had been pacing side by side along the gravel walk, 'you surely can't mean to quarrel with me because I was obliged to leave you for that little time?'

'You were not obliged; you offered to go,' she returned. 'But I certainly do not mean to quarrel. Nobody has ever called me quarrelsome.'

'You are angry, at any rate; and I must say I think that is rather unjust. I didn't intend to go off with Lady St. Austell; I hadn't the slightest wish to do anything of the sort—quite the contrary. But don't you see that we can't be always together, and that if we are to doubt one another whenever we are apart, there won't be much happiness for either of us?'

Poor Clare hardly knew what answer to make. She felt that, from the common-sense point of view, she was utterly in the wrong; she could not hope to make Vidal understand the danger of which her woman's instinct warned her; and yet she thought he might have been a little less peremptory. 'I was not angry with *you*, Adrian,' she said at length, quite humbly.

'But, my dearest girl, why should you be angry with anybody? You haven't a high opinion of Lady St. Austell—well, perhaps she doesn't deserve to be highly respected, although, so far as I can see, there is very little harm in her. But in any case, you may be sure that when she wishes to indulge in a flirtation, it isn't a person of my humble position in society that she selects. All that she did was to patronise me, and

pay me a few compliments about my writing, and ask me to take you to call upon her in London. She meant to be good-natured—indeed, she *was* good-natured. She would be very much astonished if she knew that you and I had nearly fallen out because of her.'

Clare bit her lips and looked down, without replying ; and presently Vidal resumed, ' Added to which, she is a fat old creature, with whom I hope I should never have had the bad taste to flirt under any circumstances.'

Possibly that assertion may have been more convincing than the most sensible of arguments. Clare stood still, hesitated a moment, and then, suddenly throwing her arms round Adrian's neck, burst into tears. ' I am sorry,' she sobbed out, with her head on his shoulder. ' I ought not to have been so silly. It is my horrid jealous temper—and—and—I love you so ! I can't help thinking that she does want to flirt with you ; but what does it matter ? We won't talk about her any more. You will forgive me, won't you, Adrian ? '

So this lovers' quarrel ended as all lovers' quarrels ought to end ; and if Vidal had been asked, the next day, whether it had left any disagreeable impression upon his mind, he would have answered, quite conscientiously, that it had not. Nevertheless, the conditions under which we work out our lives do not admit of obliterations. Every incident, however trivial, must needs have its consequences ; it is easy to forgive, and easy also, in a certain sense, to forget ; but perhaps it is hardly possible, with the best will in the world, to forget that one has forgiven.

CHAPTER XV

MR. AND MRS. ADRIAN VIDAL

IF at any future time it should seem possible to run railway trains between London and Paris without danger to the integrity of the British Empire, many deserving persons will, no doubt, feel that one more scourge has been taken away from existence ; but all improvements are apt to bear hard upon individual cases, and it is certain that the removal of the Channel steamers would deal a heavy blow at the prosperity of Folkestone. Why, in this fastidious age, so much enjoyment

should be derived from the contemplation of several hundreds of fellow-creatures in a most unbecoming state of physical degradation, there is no need to inquire—human nature being so full of contradictions ; but as to the fact of the enjoyment, there can hardly be two opinions ; and this is naturally intensified by a strong wind from the S.S.W., meeting the tide, and an unusually large boat-load of victims.

These conditions being satisfactorily fulfilled one afternoon in the late autumn, the visitors to Folkestone had descended from their heights in formidable numbers, and had ranged themselves on either side of that *via dolorosa* which is but too familiar to most of us. Between the lines of spectators the draggled and forlorn passengers hastened onwards, some with a ghastly pretence of jauntiness ; others darting furious glances to right and left ; others, again, too crushed by the memory of their calamities to care who saw them or what they looked like ; and as the melancholy procession filed past, those who watched it exchanged comments of a derisive nature, and were as happy as so many inhuman Spaniards at a bull-fight. But in any spectacle there are sure to be some component parts which will disappoint expectation ; and upon this occasion, as usual, a few persons insulted the public by walking ashore as if nothing was the matter. Conspicuous among these were a lady and a gentleman, of whom no worse thing could be said than that they were obviously bride and bridegroom. This, to be sure, is a humiliating classification to carry about with one, and involves those who cannot conceal their title to it in a certain amount of obloquy ; still, if one must be detected as a bridegroom, it is something not to be a sea-sick bridegroom ; and doubtless many a bride would be thankful to land upon her native shores with cheeks as rosy as those displayed by Mrs. Adrian Vidal.

The roses deepened slightly in colour as fragments of certain half-audible comments reached their owner's ears, and she quickened her pace, whispering to her husband, ‘Let us get away from these odious people. Are they London shopkeepers out for a holiday, do you think ?’

But Vidal, who did not mind being stared at, surveyed the surveyors with a smile, and answered, ‘No, my dear ; judging from their general aspect, I should say that they belonged, almost without exception, to the upper middle classes ; and they don't mean to be rude. If you were the Princess of Wales, whom they adore, they would treat you with even less respect.

It is the penalty of greatness to attract attention ; and when one happens to possess the most beautiful face in the three kingdoms—'

But at this point Mrs. Vidal caught the speaker's arm and hurried him into the shelter of the Pavilion Hotel, without allowing him to finish his sentence. It was she who, upon the principle of draining the cup of pleasure to its dregs, had decided that they should proceed no farther than Folkestone that night. The morrow would restore them to the cares and pleasures of ordinary life ; but this last evening of their honeymoon should be spent, as the others had been spent—amid surroundings which suggested no thought of anything save the present.

Those who are in a position to speak authoritatively are fond of affirming that the honeymoon is seldom the happiest period of a man's or woman's life ; but possibly Vidal and Clare may have been exceptional persons, for it is certain that their happiness, since the ceremony which had taken place in Polruth Church a month before, had known neither cloud nor check. They had visited, somewhat hastily, the cities and watering-places of South-western France ; they had dined at tables-d'hôte, hemmed in by phalanxes of their compatriots, without addressing a word to any of them, and had not wearied of one another's society, nor of ringing the changes upon an oft-told tale. Now, as the last hours of the last day of irresponsibility drew nigh, Clare would have it that they should resemble those of the previous days, and, despite the lateness of the season and the blusterous weather, insisted upon her husband's taking her out for a walk after dinner, while he smoked his evening cigar.

'When we are settled in our own home,' she said, a little ruefully, 'you will have your study, where you will smoke, and where I shall not be admitted. Well, sometimes, perhaps—for ten minutes or so, but not more. You know you can't work when anyone is in the room ; you have often told me so. You have no work to do to-night, though, and no study to work in; so I may keep you all to myself with a quiet conscience.'

It chanced, however, that Mrs. Vidal was to be denied that privilege, after all. The down express had just come in, and as our young friends crossed the hall of the hotel they encountered a stream of newly arrived travellers, amongst whom was a shrunken figure in a fur-lined coat, familiar to both of them.

'Mr. Heriot !' exclaimed Clare ; 'how glad I am to see you !'—while Vidal called out, 'Heriot himself, as I'm a living

sinner ! Why, man, I thought you were to start for the South six weeks ago !'

'I had to put it off : I have been in the doctor's clutches again,' answered Heriot, after he had shaken the hands extended to him ; 'but I shall cross to-morrow, if all's well. I never thought of meeting you here—I didn't know you meant to return so soon.'

His manner was somewhat confused, and it was evident that this unexpected meeting gave him more surprise than pleasure. After a few more words had been exchanged he said, 'I mustn't keep you standing here. Perhaps I may have an opportunity of saying good-bye to you in the morning. I'll go and see what sort of a room they have got for me now.'

'You will do no such thing,' returned Vidal. 'You will come into our sitting-room, where you will find a fire, and where they will bring you your dinner. And after that, Clare will allow you to smoke a cigar with me.'

'Thanks very much,' replied Heriot, 'but I dined before I left London.' He added, in a lower tone, 'My dear boy, do you think I have no manners ? You are very kind, but you can't possibly want me ; and one isn't supposed to recognise people when they are on their wedding trip, is one ?'

'I don't know what the supposition may be,' said Vidal, 'but I know that you are not going to be allowed the chance of cutting our acquaintance. What an unfriendly old beggar you are ! Not want you, indeed ! Why, Clare and I shall spend our evenings together for the rest of our lives ; whereas—'

'Whereas you may never spend another evening with me,' interrupted Heriot, with a slight laugh. 'Well, there's something in that.'

He suffered himself to be led into the sitting-room and installed in an arm-chair beside the fire, though he could not be persuaded to smoke in Mrs. Vidal's presence. The warm atmosphere ; the cheerful aspect of the little room, which, although it was as scantily furnished as sitting-rooms in English hotels always are, had at least so much of snugness as a crimson carpet and window-curtains can bestow ; the loquacity of the young people, who seemed to be, and indeed were, unaffectedly glad to see him—all these things ended by thawing the unwonted chill which had at first been noticeable in his demeanour. He did not say much, but sat resting his chin upon his folded hands and looking out over them with those soft, bright eyes of his, while Adrian favoured him with a narrative of their

travels, which Clare interrupted at every other word. The adventures that had befallen them had not, apparently, been of a very startling kind, nor were the little jokes and pleasantries with which they attacked one another from time to time calculated to amuse everybody ; but Heriot, whose enjoyment of life was for the most part vicarious, and who was more attached to this couple than to any other two people in the world, was made happy by their innocent happiness, as they knew that he would be, and asked for nothing better than to listen to their talk. He took advantage of a momentary lull to remark, ‘And now, I suppose you are bound for London ?’

‘Well, yes,’ answered Vidal, with a slight hesitation. ‘The Cornish scheme broke down, somehow or other. Mrs. Irvine couldn’t find any house that seemed in the least suitable for us ; and, after all, London has its advantages, you know. Clare rather thought she would prefer it too ; so I went up to have a look, and I was lucky enough to find a very decent little house in Alexandra Gardens. You don’t know where that is, of course, and I can’t explain ; but you go on to the far end of Cromwell Road, and then wander about until somebody tells you. It’s a respectable neighbourhood, if not exactly aristocratic ; and I really think that in many ways it will be better for us both to be within hail of the world.’

He seemed a little anxious to make excuses for himself ; but Heriot ignored this tendency. ‘I never believed much in the Cornish scheme,’ he observed ; ‘and I had a letter not long ago from Mrs. Irvine, in which she told me of the change in your plans. She mentioned that Mrs. Vidal——’

‘What have I done that you should address me as Mrs. Vidal ?’ demanded that lady.

‘Well, Clare, then—she mentioned that Clare was in favour of it.’

‘Of course I was in favour of it,’ said Clare ; ‘one doesn’t marry in order to end one’s days in the place of one’s birth. I held my tongue until mamma had wearied herself out with seeking for houses, because it would have been useless to speak sooner ; but all the time I was concealing a deep design beneath a mask of indifference.’

She was not, however, a particularly good hand at concealment, and she did not contrive to mislead Heriot, who quite understood the true state of the case. With her husband she had been more successful. Vidal had never suspected that she was making any sacrifice in yielding to certain unexpressed

and only half-formed wishes of his ; he thought it very natural that she should desire to see more of the world, and was glad that she had that desire ; although, if she had urged it, he would have consented to take up his residence in Cornwall without pulling wry faces. As a matter of fact, Clare dreaded the proximity of the fashionable world, but was ashamed of her fears. It may have been in some degree because she was ashamed of them that she had expressed herself so strongly as to the attractions of the metropolis ; but she had been actuated chiefly by a generous wish to give Adrian what he wanted, without putting him to the inconvenience of asking for it.

Mrs. Irvine had proved unexpectedly tractable ; but, indeed, that excellent lady was seldom anything else, if taken in the right way and at the right time. Tired of surveying country houses to which some insuperable objection was always discovered, and beginning to lament over the many other important duties that she had suffered to fall into arrear, she had received Clare's suggestion that further search should be abandoned with faint protests which gradually melted into acquiescence ; and when Adrian assured her that he should not think of furnishing his house without making appeal to her valuable advice and experience, she became quite reconciled to the new arrangement.

'We shall set to work to buy tables and chairs as soon as we get to London,' Clare went on. 'Mamma is coming up to help us, and poor Adrian will have a bad time of it, I am afraid ; but we hope to be settled down before Christmas.'

'I must look out for rugs and embroidery at Damascus,' remarked Heriot. 'Did I tell you that I was going to Syria this winter ? If I come across anything really good, I will despatch it to you, and perhaps you will deign to accept it as a reminder of an absent friend.'

'Oh no ; you must keep your pretty things for your own house,' said Clare ; and Vidal chimed in, 'I think we have accepted about enough as it is. Our tables and chairs, not to mention our carpets and curtains and other necessaries, will be your wedding present, you know, Heriot.'

He had had some qualms of conscience about that thousand-pound cheque, and felt an embarrassment in speaking of it which was more than shared by its donor, who took no notice of the allusion, but said hastily, in answer to Clare, 'My house is as full as it can hold already. I gave up attempting to beautify it years ago. Besides, I have nobody to share the

delight of contemplating fresh acquisitions with me ; and you cannot imagine, until you have tried it, how uninteresting it is to buy presents for one's self. In the East one simply can't help making purchases ; it is one of the occupations of the day : and if you won't oblige me by taking some of my surplus stock off my hands, the only result will be that it will be pounced upon by somebody else, and used for decorating a drawing-room which I shall probably never enter.'

Not long after this he wished his entertainers good-night ; and as soon as the door had closed behind him Clare exclaimed, 'Poor Mr. Heriot ! I am so very sorry for him !'

'Why ? Do you think he looks worse ?' Adrian asked.

'No, I don't know that he does ; but his is such a sad, lonely life. Adrian,' she added, drawing a little nearer to her husband, 'I think I am sorry for everybody who is not married.'

'One may be sorry for poor old Heriot without allowing one's compassion to take quite so wide a sweep as that,' remarked Vidal. 'If he felt the want of a wife I have no doubt he could find plenty of people ready and willing to marry him ; for he is very well off.'

'Oh, a wife who would marry him for the sake of his money—very likely he could. Well, it only shows that money has not much to do with happiness, after all. Poor as we are, I don't want to change places with anybody ; do you ?'

Vidal made the reply that was expected of him. He was absolutely contented, and said so a dozen times a day. The present was perfect happiness ; the future seemed full of the brightest promise ; if one of the newly-married pair felt some sinking of the heart when London drew its sooty veil over their heads, Adrian was not that one. He was pleased with everything—pleased to be back among the familiar streets ; pleased with the lodgings which Mrs. Irvine had engaged as a temporary abode for him ; pleased also, it may be (though he did not say so), at her announcement that she herself was domiciled at an hotel in the neighbourhood.

'I might have had rooms in the same house,' she whispered confidentially, 'but I wouldn't take them. Arrangements of that kind are always dangerous, and especially so at a time like this. Only the other day I heard of such a sad case—two young people agreeing to an amicable separation because they had fallen out about the drawing-room paper ; and it seems that they might have made friends again if it had not been for the mother-in-law, who most injudiciously took her daughter's part.'

'I don't think there is much danger of such a catastrophe in our case,' said Vidal laughing; but Mrs. Irvine rejoined gravely that one could never tell, and that it was best to be on the safe side.

'I hope,' said she, 'that if you notice any inclination on my part to thrust my views about furniture upon you, you will check it at once.'

Vidal promised that he would do so, but did not keep his promise. His views with regard to upholstery were of the modern order, and were so absolutely certain to differ from those of his mother-in-law, that he judged it wisest to efface himself from the outset and intrust all details to Clare, whose taste was good, if not educated up to the most recent artistic standard. This self-abnegation did not go wholly unrewarded; for the furnishing of the house in Alexandra Gardens was eventually accomplished at a cost infinitely smaller than its master had ventured to anticipate. Moreover, Mr. Irvine, who had been brought up to London in consideration of his special knowledge, proved worthy of the confidence reposed in him, and picked up some bargains in Wardour Street and elsewhere which were greatly admired in after days by persons qualified to give an opinion about such matters.

In the meantime, Clare was growing accustomed to the smoky atmosphere of a large city, and was spending her time after a fashion which very few women have ever yet failed to find agreeable. The greater part of each day was passed at the upholsterer's; and in the evenings her husband generally took her to the theatre, which was delightful. She would gladly have prolonged this pleasant interim, during which she had few visitors and no household cares, had she not been moved with pity for poor Adrian, whose literary labours had to be carried on in a dark little dining-room on the ground-floor, where he was exposed to perpetual interruption, and who bore this discomfort with a cheerfulness which she could not sufficiently admire.

At length, the list of necessary purchases being exhausted, and there being nothing further to be done but to await the good pleasure of dilatory tradesmen, Mr. and Mrs. Irvine returned home; and then a duty which had been too long delayed had to be performed. Mrs. Vidal the elder had not received the news of her son's approaching marriage in a congratulatory spirit, nor had she thought fit to be present at his wedding. Her health, she had averred, precluded her from undertaking

so long a journey, and, although she had been guilty of no overt incivility to the Irvine family, it was pretty clearly understood by them that she was not eager to make their acquaintance. To Adrian she had written a formal little note, advising him of the despatch of four salt-cellars to his address, as a wedding gift, and regretting that her straitened circumstances made it impossible for her to be as liberal as she would have desired to be upon these occasions. Poverty, she added, was generally considered a disagreeable thing. Apparently he did not think so. She hoped he would never see reason to change his opinion.

Since the receipt of this sympathetic missive, Adrian had only heard from his mother once, when she had requested him to bring his bride to Brighton on a three days' visit as soon as he could spare time to do so. She would not think of asking him to remain longer than that in her dull house, she said, being well aware how few attractions she was able to offer.

There was nothing for it but to comply with so modest and reasonable a request : but Vidal put off doing so as long as he could, and took the train for Brighton at last with more trepidation than he would have cared to own to. He knew that Mrs. Vidal would be prejudiced against her daughter-in-law ; he knew that when she was prejudiced against a person she was often spiteful to that person, and sometimes extremely rude ; and he shrewdly suspected that Clare would not stand much rudeness. He himself, having a horror of disputes and recriminations, had always managed to get on tolerably well with his mother by the simple expedient of allowing her to say whatever she pleased ; but his sister, whose temper was quicker, had not been equally fortunate, and it had happened to him more than once to be an agonised spectator of scenes which he had no desire to see repeated in his wife's case. Therefore, between London and Brighton, he endeavoured by various hints to prepare Clare for possible contingencies.

' My mother is rather odd in some ways ; it isn't everybody who takes to her—but, after all, she is my mother, you know. Sometimes she says things that people don't like ; but if you don't notice them she generally stops ; and anything is better than having a row, don't you think so ? For three days one can put up with a good deal. And she doesn't really mean to be disagreeable '

From these and other similar phrases, Clare gathered that Mrs. Vidal did mean to be disagreeable and would be disagree-

able ; but the prospect did not dismay her. For Adrian's sake she would have submitted to many worse things than the scolding of a shrewish old woman, such as she imagined Mrs. Vidal to be, and she determined to accept any and every insult that might be offered to her without retaliating.

When she saw the tall dark woman who had preserved a certain youthfulness of figure, and whose voice had something of the ring of Adrian's, though her features and colouring were so unlike his, she was agreeably disappointed. Mrs. Vidal, if not very affectionate, was far from being insulting. Adrian had told the truth, while supposing that he was doing quite the contrary, when he had said that she did not mean to be disagreeable. After her peculiar fashion she was fond of her son, and looked forward to his visits more than she would have acknowledged, or than anyone who knew her would have imagined. She did her best to make this visit pleasant to her guests, whom she treated more like strangers than near relatives ; she put her brougham at their disposal, excusing herself from leaving the house on the plea of ill-health, though there was nothing in the world the matter with her ; and during their stay she gave two dinner parties, to which she invited the *élite* of her acquaintance. At these festivities Clare attracted much notice and admiration, and was so fortunate as to earn the good opinion of her mother-in-law.

'I think your marriage was an imprudent one,' the latter took occasion to remark to Adrian ; 'but, setting prudence aside, you are to be congratulated. Your wife is decidedly distinguished.'

'Thanks, mother : I was sure you would think so,' said Adrian, who had not been at all sure of any such thing, and was greatly pleased by this unexpected compliment. 'And she is as beautiful as she is distinguished ; you will allow that ?'

'She is pretty, certainly ; but her good looks chiefly concern you. It is more important that she should be a lady. And she is a lady.'

'Well, yes ; I think she may claim to be a lady,' answered Adrian, laughing a little. 'If she had not been a lady I should hardly have married her.'

'No ?' said Mrs. Vidal, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows. 'I did not know that you considered that essential.'

It was not in the poor woman's nature to be gracious. The world had gone ill with her—or she fancied that it had gone ill—and possibly she may not have desired that the world

should go too well with her neighbours. She was not conscious of wishing them any harm ; she was not conscious of caring much about them, one way or the other ; but a sort of misguided instinct, which she was unable to resist, led her to hit upon the speeches that were most likely to cause them annoyance. Thus she profited by an opportunity which offered, the same day, to say to Clare, ‘I hope you are a good manager. Adrian will not be of much assistance to you in money matters, I am afraid.’

‘I dare say we shall contrive to get on,’ Clara replied.

‘That is exactly what he would say. He always thinks that he will get on somehow ; but unfortunately the fact remains that there are only twenty shillings in a pound. You must have noticed how sanguine and impulsive Adrian is. He gives himself what he wants at the moment, and doesn’t trouble about consequences. Look at your engagement and marriage, for example—an affair of six months ! As I was telling him this morning, he has been fortunate, in my opinion ; but it does seem to have been rather sudden.’

‘I suppose it does,’ said Clare, determined not to be annoyed.

‘Yes ; and of course it is no disparagement to you to say that he ran a considerable risk by being in such a hurry. But that is just his way. Ever since he left school he has been in love with somebody or other.’

‘He has never married before, though,’ remarked Clare, smiling, and endeavouring not to show how distasteful this assertion as to her husband’s past life was to her.

‘No ; very true—and perhaps marriage may steady him. I am sure I hope it will.’

‘I don’t think he has ever been unsteady,’ Clare said.

‘Oh, not in the way of being what people call “wild.” Still, one can’t help remembering that you are not his first flame ; and that makes one fancy that, perhaps—— However, I have no doubt he will make a very good husband, as husbands go, if he is properly managed. I would not be too strict with him, if I were you. What men of his stamp like is to have all pecuniary bothers taken off their hands, to be allowed plenty of liberty, and to have a good dinner provided for them every day. I don’t say that this is justifiable, or quite fair upon their wives ; but we must take the world as we find it, and it is the more to be wished that one of you should be able to face facts, because it is certain that the other never will.’

Such a system of philosophy was hardly likely to find favour in the eyes of any bride. Clare told herself that her mother-in-law's words were prompted solely by ill-nature, and merited nothing but contempt ; yet she often recalled them afterwards—as, indeed, we all recall the speeches that hurt us most—and even at the time she was uncomfortably conscious that their cynicism had an admixture of truth in it. It is unquestionably true that most men like their dinner to be well cooked, and it is perhaps pardonable in some men—in geniuses especially—to shirk the worries attendant upon domestic expenditure. That much Clare was willing to concede ; but what was meant by plenty of liberty ? She knew very well that there was a certain kind of liberty which she could never be capable of allowing to her husband. She did not, however, give utterance to her thoughts, but merely said with a slight intonation of displeasure, ‘I am sorry you think so badly of Adrian.’

Mrs. Vidal stared. ‘I don’t think badly of him,’ she answered ; ‘he is not bad—only a little flighty. I see him as he is, that is all. Perhaps I can judge of my children more dispassionately than most mothers, because I have no personal influence over them. Their father chose to make them independent of me in his will, and they have always been allowed to follow their own devices—or, rather, have insisted upon following them. My daughter Georgina, as I dare say you know, is by way of being a strong-minded woman, and travels about the world all by herself.’

‘She is in the South Sea Islands now, is she not ?’ asked Clare, glad to change the subject.

‘She was when I last heard from her. I believe she means to write a book on her return, if she ever returns ; but it would not surprise me in the least to hear that she had married a native chief. She has had several chances, which she has thought proper to despise, of marrying well in this country ; but, judging by her appearance when she came back from her last journey into the interior of Zanzibar, nobody is likely to ask her again. A more deplorable object I never beheld. Mere skin and bone !—and such a complexion that I really thought at first she must have been staining her face with walnut-juice in order to pass herself off as a Hottentot. Speaking from a rational point of view, Georgina ought to have married and Adrian ought to have remained single ; but just the reverse has happened, you see.’

Upon the whole, Clare was not sorry to turn her back upon Brighton, and could not quite agree with Adrian when he declared that their visit had been a triumphant success. ‘Then we must beware of repeating it, lest we should go away less triumphant next time,’ she said.

At this he laughed, and answered that it would probably be some months before they received another invitation. ‘My mother has done her duty, and so have we. As for pleasure, we don’t arrange meetings with that object in our family.’

CHAPTER XVI

THE ‘ANGLO-SAXON’

THE thirty or forty eligible residences which have received the name of Alexandra Gardens are to be found in an outlying quarter of the district now known as South Kensington, *vice* Brompton superseded. They stand upon a spot where there were actual gardens—cabbage-gardens—not so very long ago; but all trace of these has disappeared, and the word, as applied to this special row of buildings, has no more justification than that of custom and precedent. Viewed as dwellings, they probably lack something in soundness of structure; but to set against this, you have—as Adrian’s landlord was at some pains to point out to him—the great advantage of originality of design, each house possessing its own distinctive character; so that, however odd might be the shape of your drawing-room, you could count with tolerable certainty upon that of your neighbour’s drawing-room being odder still. No. 12 was fairly commodious, and the disposition of the rooms was certainly clever. There was an appearance of space about the hall; the staircase was broad and not too steep; the drawing-room and library had recesses in unexpected places, and the whole house was well adapted for those arrangements in stained glass and lincrusta, and wall-paper resembling stamped leather, whereby the modern Londoner strives to render existence beautiful. The rent demanded was a trifle high, to be sure, considering the remoteness of the situation; but upon this point Vidal quoted a dictum of the late Baron von Bunsen to the effect that a man should always house himself more expensively and live more simply than his means

warrant ; adding, as a result of his own observations, that people won't come to see you if you live at Notting Hill, whereas they will cheerfully drive double the distance for the same purpose if only your address ends with the letters S.W.

That it was desirable to have many visitors he took for granted ; and Clare, who, for her part, would have been perfectly satisfied to see nobody but her husband from week's end to week's end, fell in with his views, and welcomed the visitors when they presented themselves, as they very soon did, in large numbers. She was proud of her husband's popularity; it was pleasant to her to receive the ladies who had known him in his bachelor days ; to listen to the flattering things that they said about him ; and to show them her pretty house. If there were difficulties in the way of effecting that retrenchment in housekeeping which was to balance the excess of rent, she kept them to herself. From the outset she resolved that Adrian should not be troubled with such petty cares ; and she fought single-handed the battle that most young wives have to fight. Happily, she was not altogether a novice. Her mother's frequent absences and occupations had caused a large share of the management of the Cardrew household to fall upon her shoulders, and she knew pretty well what was required for the smaller establishment over which she now reigned. What she did not know, and had to learn by painful experience, was the discrepancy that exists between Cornish and London prices. She had troubles with the milkman and troubles with the cook, and perhaps a few tears may have fallen upon the weekly bills, which somehow always exceeded the sum agreed upon by her and her husband as sufficient. She paid her way—not, however, without the sacrifice of some of her pin-money—and maintained a light-some demeanour ; yet, little as she would have acknowledged it, even to herself, the bloom of her youth was rubbed off by this daily struggle, and married life began to reveal itself to her as something different from the life of her dreams.

It is a curious fact that men do not, as a rule, shrink from subjecting their wives to the trials which are inseparable from poverty; although very few of us would care to see our daughters exposed to what, after all, is a sort of degradation. Adrian handed over his weekly cheque and asked no questions. To do him justice, if Clare had requested more, he would have given her more without grumbling, though he could not very

well have afforded it ; but since she did not ask, he let well alone. Moreover, he, too, had his daily share of work to get through. That it happened to be a pleasanter kind of work than hers was not his fault.

Early in the year his second novel saw the light, and for a few weeks after the appearance of the book there was a pause of anxious expectation in Alexandra Gardens. The author, after vacillating some time between hope and fear, was inclined towards despondency : on the other hand, the author's wife, who had seen the proof sheets, was so confident as to the favourable reception which the public would accord to 'Two Lovers' that it was difficult to help being infected by her enthusiasm.

'It is by far the most interesting novel I ever read,' she declared, with pardonable exaggeration; 'there isn't a page in it that I should wish altered. And it is *you* all through, Adrian. I didn't recognise you in "Satiety;" it seemed to me that you were not writing what you thought so much as what worldly people profess to think. But in "Two Lovers" you are yourself. I don't know whether the critics will praise it or not ; but I do know that everyone who cares for a charming story will read it and delight in it.'

'They won't discover that it's charming unless the critics tell them so,' answered Vidal. 'I don't know why anyone should think it charming. There's nothing in it that I can see.'

As a matter of fact, there was rather more in it than he supposed. It was not a work of the highest genius ; but it was an excellent story, very well told, and it had just that happy combination of romance with realism which is so sure to please and so hard to accomplish. Vidal had conceived his novel under conditions especially favourable to this kind of composition. The greater part of it had been written at a time when he was profoundly and, as he believed, hopelessly in love ; his pen had faithfully recorded his own feelings ; tho situations and incidents that he described were many of them such as he himself had had experience of ; half unconsciously, he had made the chief character a copy of Clare Irvine—not the real Clare, but an idealised version of her which she herself would never have recognised. This imaginary personage was destined to become one of the most popular heroines of modern fiction, and in many an English household her name is still remembered and coupled with the creations of authors

to whose celebrity Adrian Vidal has never attained. The book had been completed with more ease and rapidity than his previous one ; and this, among other things, caused him to think slightlyingly of it. It is proverbial that an artist is no judge of his own works. He can hardly avoid estimating their value by the amount of pains that he has taken to produce them, whereas the purchaser has quite another standard.

From the purchaser's point of view, 'Two Lovers' was almost as satisfactory as Clare had pronounced it to be ; and Vidal was not kept long in suspense before this encouraging verdict was made known to him. One afternoon he came in, holding in his hand a copy of his old enemy, the *Monday Review*, which he tossed down upon the work-table beside which his wife was seated. From the subdued radiance of his countenance, Clare perceived, before she looked at the paper, that all was well ; but she was scarcely prepared for the unstinted praise which presently met her eye.

The reviewer began by saying that he had opened 'Two Lovers' with grave apprehensions. The lovers to whom recent writers of fiction had introduced him had not been pleasant people to meet, and he had felt no desire to become acquainted with two more of them. But this distrustful attitude had soon been abandoned.

'After we had reached the end of the first chapter, our critical faculties fell into abeyance ; we surrendered ourselves unreservedly to the charm of this most delightful novel, and read it from beginning to end without marking a single passage for praise or blame. We hardly like to think how many years it is since we have been able to say as much of any novel that has fallen into our hands. "Two Lovers" is a book to be enjoyed, not to be criticised. It is throughout so healthy in tone, so spontaneous, and so true to nature, that a man feels himself growing young again as he reads, and has not the heart to cavil at details, or to point out to the author in what respects his story is capable of improvement. We are heartily glad to see that Mr. Vidal can produce something better than the stale and dreary moralising which he inflicted upon us in "Satiety." He may rest assured that the less he gives us of that kind of writing in future, and the more of such novels as "Two Lovers," the better it will be alike for his readers and his reputation.'

Now this was certainly very handsome ; and though Vidal might affect to make light of it, and say that it was always a

mere toss-up whether you got kicks or halfpence from that quarter, he could not altogether conceal his satisfaction nor refrain from remarking by-and-by, 'After all, the old *Monday* is about the best paper that deigns to criticise us poor novel-writers with anything like fulness. The men who write for it express themselves like gentlemen and men of the world ; there's no denying that. I don't think they are always quite fair, you know ; but—'

'Well, they have been fair this time, at all events,' interrupted Clare, decisively; and Adrian did not feel called upon to contradict her.

The *Monday Review* happened to be the first to notice 'Two Lovers ;' but other journals speedily followed suit, and were no whit less flattering in their observations. One and all, big guns and little guns, pronounced unequivocally in favour of the book; there was not a single discordant note in the whole chorus of approval. What was perhaps of more importance was that the good opinion of the press was fully confirmed by the public. Within a few weeks of its appearance the first edition of 'Two Lovers' was exhausted ; and a second and a third went off with equal rapidity, and Vidal's publishers, smiling graciously upon him, assured him that the sale of the work showed no signs of diminishing. In these days of circulating libraries such triumphs are not common, and a comparatively unknown writer who is thus distinguished may be pretty sure of having the whole publishing world at his feet. The number of letters that Vidal received at this time from publishers and editors of magazines was so great that he began to find the mere answering of them a serious tax upon his leisure ; and if he could have accepted all the engagements offered to him, his fortune would have been made.

Nor was it only in this practical fashion that his success was acknowledged. The circle of his friends and acquaintances, always a large one, became so wide, now that he was a celebrity, as to be almost unmanageable. Parliament had met, London was filling fast, and it appeared as if everybody who did not already know the talented author of 'Two Lovers' was dying to be introduced to him. The roadway of Alexandra Gardens, which was, in general, unaccustomed to traffic, and required but little attention from the parochial authorities, was cut up by the wheels of the carriages which stopped at the door of No. 12 : Clare's card-tray was filled to overflowing, and invitations to dinner arrived at every hour of the day.

The young man's head was not turned by all this adulation, which indeed he was sensible enough to know that he had done very little to deserve. He was astonished and rather amused at it; personally, he did not much care about stories that were frankly stories and nothing more; he still thought the work which had brought him into such prominence vastly inferior to its predecessor; he was inclined, like Voltaire, to exclaim, '*Les honneurs et les biens pleurent enfin sur moi pour une comédie de la foire!*' Nevertheless, he thoroughly enjoyed being made much of. He accepted the invitations which bore his wife's name as well as his own, and declined those in which her existence was ignored. He basked in the sunshine of social renown, giving himself no airs, but receiving the compliments paid him with an innocent gratification which finished the conquest of his admirers' hearts. There are men with whom notoriety does not agree, just as there are plants which suffer by being taken out of the shade. Others, again, require light and warmth to bring out what is best in them, and to this latter category Adrian Vidal belonged.

'I can't pretend to be above caring whether people are kind to me or not,' he said once to Clare, whose thirst for applause was soon slaked, and who was getting tired of dining out every night. 'I like to be liked: it's a harmless weakness.'

'Yes,' she agreed, rather dubiously; 'it is pleasant to be liked for one's own sake; but to be liked only because one has done something out of the common—I don't know whether that is such a good thing. And how can one tell that it will last?'

'Oh, it won't last,' answered Adrian, shrugging his shoulders. 'All the more reason for making the most of it while it does.' And then he laughingly told his wife that she was a misanthrope, and went upstairs to dress for dinner.

It occasionally happened now that Clare sat down to a solitary meal. As has been said before, Vidal made it a rule to decline all invitations in which she was not included; but some invitations reached him in which it was impossible that she should be included, and which prudence forbade him to refuse. On this evening, for instance, he had been asked to dine at the Acropolis Club to meet a certain Mr. Pilkington, whose position as a man of letters was of the first rank, and who was considered by his disciples to be a sort of English Sainte-Beuve. Whether Mr. Pilkington had ever made good

his title to be so considered was of course a question which admitted of two answers; but his style of writing was certainly graceful and impartial, and he had a high opinion of his own abilities, which always counts for something. He had at one time been editor of a review famous for its dogmatic utterances on science, philosophy, and religion, but had resigned the post on finding that it involved him in controversies which were not to his taste. He was well known in society, and passed for being an ambitious man ; though he seldom said or did anything to justify that supposition. Being possessed of a moderate fortune, he was not dependent upon his pen for a livelihood, and only wrote when he felt so disposed. Latterly he had written little ; but whenever an article signed by him appeared, it was read with interest and respect. A fair scholar and an excellent critic, he prided himself upon his gift of discrimination, and would sometimes take a young author by the hand, to the delight of that young author, and prophesy great things of him. However, he did not now do this so frequently as in former years, some of his *protégés* having in the most unscrupulous manner falsified his predictions.

When Vidal was asked to meet this gentleman, whom as yet he knew only by repute, he felt that a high compliment was being paid to him. His host—one Egerton, a well-to-do middle-aged bachelor, who liked to play *Mæcenas* upon a small scale, and made a point of knowing all authors, was just the sort of man to whom Mr. Pilkington would have been likely to apply had he been desirous of meeting a fresh writer of promise, and Vidal was disposed to think that some such desire must have been intimated. Moreover, a rumour had reached him that Pilkington was about to start a new magazine or review, and he had some faint hope that he was going to be asked to contribute to this. As far as promises to provide fiction were concerned, he already had his hands full ; but he would willingly have resigned one of these more lucrative engagements for the honour of being named among the select band over which the great Pilkington might be expected to preside.

Egerton, stout, grey-haired, good-humoured, and somewhat fussy in manner, met him as he entered the hall of the Acropolis, and held him by the hand while he murmured confidentially, 'So glad you were able to come ! Pilkington hasn't turned up yet ; but he'll be here directly, I suppose.'

Very anxious to make your acquaintance—asked me a heap of questions about you. You'll find him an uncommonly pleasant fellow, when you know him—a little stiff, some people think. Quiet, you know—not much gush about him; but when he says a thing, you may be sure that he means it.'

This exordium sounded promising. It was evident that Mr. Pilkington had been saying, or was going to say, something to the advantage of the person addressed. Vidal made an appropriate response, and his entertainer, turning to a tall, cadaverous-looking man who was perusing the play-bills on the wall, went on :

'I don't know whether you know Percy Kean. Kean, let me introduce you to Mr. Vidal—"Two Lovers," you know—celebrated author.'

The last words would perhaps have been more fittingly applied to the elder than to the younger of the two men thus presented to one another. Percy Kean had tried his hand at various branches of literature, and, during a career of something like twenty years, had been moderately successful in everything that he had attempted. His comedies generally drew full houses; his humorous verses, if they did not quite entitle him to call himself a poet, were widely read; he was connected with several weekly journals, and was reputed to be the writer of some political skits which had at different times amused those who understood them. He took a large bony hand out of his pocket and extended it to Adrian, saying, 'Glad to see you. I wish the other man would come!'

But the other man did not come for half an hour, and when he did come, made no apology for being late. Vidal was a little disappointed in his appearance, which was rather that of an elderly man of fashion than of an eminent scholar. His hair, which was turning grey at the temples, was parted in the middle and carefully brushed; he wore a short, trim beard, and had an eye-glass tightly screwed into his right eye. He spoke in a low, deliberate voice, pronouncing his vowels very broadly, and was a shade too conscious of being the most distinguished person present. It may be that Vidal was also somewhat disappointed by the reception accorded to him. He had been prepared for a cordial shake of the hand, and possibly a graceful reference to his book; but all that he got from the great man was a bow, accompanied by an indistinct murmur; and then Egerton said briskly, 'Well, suppose we go in to dinner.'

When the four men were seated in the spacious strangers' room, and were doing justice to the cooking, for which the Acropolis enjoys a well-deserved celebrity, Mr. Pilkington began to talk, and talked pleasantly enough upon a variety of subjects, of which literature was not one. Indeed, he seemed disinclined to enter upon this particular topic, and ignored several attempts on the part of his good-humoured host to introduce it. He had the placid air of being assured that what he said would be listened to which characterises superior beings. He spoke with a polished fluency that reminded Vidal very much of his writings ; he could count upon at least one appreciative hearer in Egerton, and paid little heed to the occasional caustic comments with which Kean broke in upon his periods. When these interruptions occurred Pilkington paused for a moment, smiled courteously, and then resumed his discourse, without making any direct reply. Evidently, he did not think much of Kean, and somehow or other, it seemed rather as if Kean did not think much of him. It was not until dinner was nearly over that a question of Egerton's caused him to say a few words about the craft to which three out of this party of four belonged ; and then Vidal obtained the little compliment that he had ceased to expect.

'By the way, Pilkington, how did you like —'s book ?' Egerton asked, referring to a novel which had recently appeared and which had created some sensation, less by reason of intrinsic merits than of the sweeping indictment which it contained against the morality of the age.

Pilkington leant back in his chair and balanced his dessert-knife upon his forefinger. 'I should say,' he replied, in his quiet, deliberate way, 'that — had better stick to the kind of writing by which he made his name, and let novels alone. He has a certain smartness—a certain facility : he treats the problems of life with that sort of light-heartedness which is always welcomed by people who like to have their thinking done for them ; but he seems to be entirely wanting in creative power. His novel is not a true picture of the men and women of the day, and what is worse is that it is unpleasing. Nowadays we don't like coarse attacks and knock-down blows. The kind of hard hitting that amused our fathers, offends us ; and it would be almost as disagreeable to us to read such another onslaught as Macaulay made upon Robert Montgomery as to see a man throw a glass of wine in his neighbour's face. The present generation is

sometimes accused of being too thin-skinned to appreciate satire. I should venture to doubt the justice of that accusation; but I am sure that it's now more than ever a necessary condition of satire that it should have some humour in it, and also some kindness. To be effective, it must be such satire as Thackeray's—or as yours,' he added, with a little bow to the young man who was sitting opposite to him.

Adrian felt himself reddening with pleasure. The speaker might not, and probably did not, intend that too literal an inference should be drawn from his remark; but that incidental coupling of Vidal's name with Thackeray's was certainly a very pretty way of acknowledging such merits as the former might possess. Egerton stretched out his left leg and stealthily kicked his young friend under the table, as who should say, 'There! I hope you're satisfied with that!' Kean threw back his head, widened his mouth from ear to ear, and contemplated the ceiling.

Thinking over this pantomime afterwards, Adrian was led to conclude that Mr. Kean either did not believe in Pilkington's sincerity or differed from him in opinion. Upon the whole, he did not particularly like Mr. Kean. Towards Pilkington, on the other hand, he could not help feeling drawn; and after an adjournment had been made to the smoking-room, he was glad to find himself alone for a few minutes with that gentleman, Egerton having (not without intention, probably) taken away his other guest to examine some ventilators which had lately been put up.

Pilkington said at once what Adrian had half hoped that he might be going to say. 'I don't know whether any one has told you, Mr. Vidal, that I have been asked to undertake the editorship of a new magazine.'

'I heard something about it,' answered Vidal.

'I say a magazine,' the other went on, 'for want of a better name; but in reality our new venture will be more or less *sui generis*. It will have something of the magazine in it; but it will also have something of the review and something of the newspaper. What I wish to do is to provide people with a sort of—er—survey of each month as it comes to an end. Not, of course, a mere *résumé* of events; but a series of articles, written by first-class men, on what is taking place in literature, science, art, and society. I had at first thought of excluding politics; but I begin to see that this is scarcely practicable. There will, therefore, be a political article, which

I shall undertake myself—not because I feel any special aptitude that way, but because, oddly enough, I cannot lay my hand upon a single other man who is wholly free from party bias. In this, as in all other departments, I am anxious that the paper should take an attitude of absolute independence. Each writer will express his own views and sign his own name at the foot of them. I think I can say that in every instance the name signed will at least be a guarantee of competence. The articles will be shorter, lighter, and far more numerous than those of the ordinary half-crown magazine. Perhaps I may add that they will also be more readable: at all events, it will be our aim to make them so. In addition to these articles, I have consented—somewhat unwillingly, I must confess—to publish a serial story; and I am in hopes that some day you may be induced to let us have a novel from your pen. At present I am too deeply pledged to make further arrangements in that direction; but I should be glad if you saw your way to join us as a permanent member of our staff. In that case I should ask you to furnish us with a monthly article on current light literature, English, French, and American.'

There was a short pause, during which Pilkington sipped his coffee and blew a cloud of smoke from the cigarette which he held between his fingers. Then Adrian said—what was indeed the truth—that he felt exceedingly flattered by the offer made to him, and asked nothing better than to accept it. 'But,' he added, with a slight laugh, 'I am afraid my name can't be considered as one of those which are a guarantee of competence.'

Pilkington waved his hand and smiled pleasantly. 'You must allow me to hold a different opinion,' he replied. 'It is true that you have done nothing yet in the way of criticism—or at least, if you have, I have no knowledge of the fact; but I have the vanity to think that I can judge of a man's capabilities without asking him for direct evidence of them. From what I have seen of your writings, I am satisfied that you will suit us, if our terms suit you.'

He then named the terms in question, which struck Adrian as extremely liberal, and the bargain was concluded just as the two other men returned. Pilkington did not think it necessary to change the subject.

'I have been persuading Mr. Vidal to give us his co-operation in our new magazine,' he remarked.

'Dear me !' cried Egerton. 'Vidal, I congratulate you ; it's a grand opening. Not that you need an opening ; still it isn't every one who would have such a chance given him, you know.'

'You may congratulate me too, if you like,' said Pilkington, with ready tact ; whereupon his friend responded heartily, 'Of course—of course ! congratulate you both most sincerely.'

'Oh, ah !—the new magazine,' murmured Kean, dropping his long, gaunt person into an arm-chair. 'I'm in it too, ain't I, Pilkington ?'

'As an occasional contributor,' replied that gentleman serenely.

'Oh yes : I know I'm only a casual. By the way, have you hit upon a name for the thing yet ?'

'Well, no,' answered the future editor ; 'I can't say that I have come to a final decision. I should have liked to find something that would convey an idea of the light character of the publication—because, although we shall have to treat of serious subjects, we don't want to be heavy—but, unfortunately, all the best titles have been appropriated. "Figaro," for instance, would have suited us very well—or the "Owl,"'

'Why not the "Ostrich" ?' suggested Kean. 'The omnivorous ostrich—he's the bird for you. Politics, fiction, science, slander—buns, broken glass, tenpenny nails—nothing comes amiss to him. Call it the "Ostrich," Pilkington.'

'I'm afraid that wouldn't do,' said Pilkington. 'The ostrich is chiefly known to the public for habits which we should be sorry to impute to ourselves as clear-sighted observers.'

'Well, then,' said the other, 'let's ring for a dictionary, and search it through till we get an idea. I've tried that plan before now with the happiest results.' And he suited the action to the word.

It seemed possible that Mr. Kean had taken just half a glass too much champagne. His tone evinced a disrespectful tendency to make fun of the new magazine, if not of its promoter. But Pilkington remained unruffled. It would have taken a very different man from Kean to disturb his courtesy, his kindly toleration of human folly, his modest but firm belief in himself.

'I don't know that names are of any great importance,' he continued ; 'the generality of newspapers and magazines

have names which are comparatively meaningless. Still, in choosing a new one, it would be desirable, if it were possible, to give some sort of a clue to one's intention.'

'Just so,' agreed Egerton. 'Now you, I take it, want to be understood as intelligent and disinterested spectators of what is going on around you. In short, a band of cultured men and men of the world, associated together for the purpose of —of—well, for journalistic purposes ; but tied down to no special line, and ready to judge every question upon its merits.'

'Yes ; but, unfortunately, you can't very well put all that into one word,' said Pilkington. 'All things considered, I am afraid we shall have to content ourselves with a *pis-aller*. The "Empire" has been suggested to me, and also "Great Britain ;" but I am inclined to something more inclusive—the *Ang'o-Saxon* for example. But really it does not much signify.'

'The *Anglo-Saxon* would take in America and the colonies,' observed Egerton thoughtfully.

'Who might otherwise consider themselves slighted,' broke in Kean, looking up from the dictionary which he had been studying. 'I've got lots of good names here, though. The A's don't come out very well ; the "Amalgam" and the "Anomaly" are all I can do for you in the way of A's ; but we improve as we go on. I'll just read you out my list : The "Balance" (capital name that for an impartial paper. Weigh everybody and find everybody wanting, you know), the "Butterfly," the "Buttonholer," the "Bore," the——'

'Oh, I say, Kean, come now !' remonstrated Egerton.

Pilkington preserved his lenient smile as he rose and bade his host good-night. 'I think we shall have to stick to the *Anglo-Saxon*,' he said ; 'unless Mr. Vidal can help us to something better'

He took the young man familiarly by the arm and led him towards the door. 'There's one thing more I had intended to mention. Our paper will not be the property of any publishing firm. We considered it best not to hamper ourselves in that way. The bulk of the capital is provided by private individuals who are not themselves literary men ; but all our permanent contributors have some small pecuniary interest in the undertaking. In many ways I think it is well that this should be so, and if you like to place a trifle—say a couple of

thousand pounds—in our hands, I hope you will have no cause to regret having done so.'

Vidal felt rather uncomfortable. Two thousand pounds was not exactly his notion of a trifle ; and, as a married man, he doubted whether he had any business to go in for sporting investments.

'Of course,' continued Pilkington, who was now getting into his great-coat, 'I can't say what rate of interest you would receive. It might be fifty per cent. or it might be five.'

'Or it might be nothing,' Vidal ventured to suggest.

'Or it might be nothing. Every new enterprise is speculative, and cannot be otherwise. I need not say that you are under no sort of obligation to run what you may consider a risk ; and of course it does not signify at all to us, in a pecuniary sense, whether you accept our offer or not. My own feeling in the matter is simply this : that having a money interest, however small, in a paper helps a man more than anything else to identify himself with it and to put his best work into it.'

'He has his salary,' remarked Vidal.

'Oh, yes ; he has his salary, no doubt. Well, you can think it over, Mr. Vidal, and let me know what your wishes are in the course of a few days. Good-night !'

These last words were spoken upon the door-step of the club, from which Pilkington was driven away in his brougham. Adrian perceived that he would have to risk those two thousand pounds, and he was rather sorry that he had not at once yielded with a good grace, instead of seeming to hint at doubts by which his future chief had evidently been ever so slightly offended. It would not do to offend Pilkington, he thought ; but at the same time he would have preferred to keep his money in his pocket. Careless and hopeful though he was, he had enough of common-sense to be aware that the new magazine might be excellently written and excellently conducted, and yet fail to establish a footing. Turning pensively back into the hall he encountered Kean, who was coming out, and who proposed to walk as far as Piccadilly with him.

'So you are to do the monthly review of fiction for the *Anglo-Saxon*,' he remarked when they were out in the street. 'You never tried anything of the kind before, I suppose ? Ah, I thought not. It's an original idea, that of Pilkington's, to put all his square men into the round holes, and I shouldn't wonder if it were to take. A sonnet by an eminent scientific

writer, a serial story by a bishop, and so on, ought to tickle the fancy of the jaded public, eh ? Pilkington isn't quite the Solomon that he gets credit for being ; but he's no fool either.'

'Do you think the *Anglo-Saxon* is likely to pay ?' asked Vidal, who was more interested for the moment in this question than in Mr. Pilkington's reputation.

'I don't know why it shouldn't. It's a novelty—neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring ; and the first few numbers are sure to be read. We shall know more about it by this time next year ; but at present I should say it had a fair chance of success. Personally, I don't much care whether it sinks or swims.'

'The difference between us,' thought Vidal, 'is that I do.' But he did not say this, and as he drove homewards he took some comfort from the thought that, since all the contributors were in the same boat, they would, as their editor had astutely observed, certainly do their best to keep it afloat.

CHAPTER XVII

AN AWKWARD ENCOUNTER

To be the author of a novel which for a few months is in everybody's hands is after all no great matter. Very many persons have accomplished that much and have continued in a state of social obscurity from which it has occurred to nobody to drag them. But Adrian Vidal, having certain special circumstances in his favour, neither desired nor was suffered to remain obscure. When the east winds of spring were blowing clouds of smoke from the city and of dust along Piccadilly ; when the black trees in the London squares were beginning to show touches of green here and there ; and when people who had daughters to present were coming up for the first Drawing Rooms of the season, this fortunate young writer found himself so much in request that he could hardly have been made more of if he had been a successful general or a popular actor. He assured Clare, laughingly, that he never before had any conception of the number of people that there were in London, or of the quantity of entertainments that they gave. He did not weary of dinners and compliments, and it must be owned that he could

swallow a large share of both without risk of indigestion. The stereotyped phrases ; the smiling countenances which were so curiously like one another ; the letters from unknown correspondents, which probably every novelist receives, and which begin with ‘ Dear Sir,—Although personally a stranger to you, I cannot resist,’ &c. ; all these things were a delight to him. He estimated them neither above nor below their proper value, but took them for just what they were worth—evidences that he had given pleasure to a certain number of his fellow-creatures ; that he had amused, and had not bored them. And that, when all has been said upon the subject that can be said, remains the chief aim of fiction. Vidal was satisfied with his attainment of it. He felt that he owed a debt of gratitude to a world which had brought him so much happiness, and which he so sincerely loved. To have partly discharged that debt by the exercise of the humble talents with which the gods had gifted him was surely something. And being in this mood of universal benevolence, it was only in the nature of things that eh should find his goodwill reflected back upon him ; so that for the time being he wended his way along a flowery path, thinking no evil and fearing none.

But, alas ! what is one man’s meat is another man’s poison, and the bricks and mortar which are so dear to some of us are mere prison walls to others. In the full swing of excitements that to her were no longer exciting, in the heated, scented atmosphere of ball-rooms, and amid the ceaseless chatter of tongues and clatter of knives and forks, Clare was pining for the Cornish moors, and for a breath of the pure salt air that sweeps over them from the Atlantic. Trite modes of speech did not come to her easily ; she had not acquired the art of conversation as it is understood by those who have few interests in common : glad as she was that her husband should be appreciated, the perpetual eulogy of his work ended by palling upon her. Thus, although Mrs. Vidal’s beauty was undeniably, it was pretty generally agreed that there was not much in her. That, under these circumstances, she should have been a good deal left to herself was not surprising, and gave her little concern. What did cause her something like an incipient heartache was the fear, which she could not always stifle, that Adrian was slowly but surely drifting away from her. To all outward appearance he was as fond of her as he had ever been ; she had nothing to complain of in the way of words or looks. But had not that subtle inward change already set in ?—that

change which none can welcome and none can resist—the change from the love of the lover to the love of the husband. She was afraid of it ; she did not know how to arrest it ; she grudged the long hours spent away from home, and the solitude *à deux* which he seemed to regret so little.

One evening she was at a crowded party, looking pale and languid, and longing for Adrian to give her his customary signal to retreat, when, among the strange faces that surrounded her, there suddenly appeared one which brought a faint tinge of colour into her own. She had not seen Mr. Wilbraham since he had parted from her on the quay at Lucerne ; her final rejection of his offer had been conveyed by post, and had elicited only a brief reply, in which the writer had expressed himself with something of the formality of one who suspects that he has been supplanted. With that he had passed out of her thoughts and, as she supposed, out of her life for ever. But now here he was standing before her, and for a moment she hesitated whether to greet him or not. It was only for a moment. Reflecting that this might probably be but the first of many such encounters, and that it would be very stupid to create an awkwardness at the outset, she advanced a step or two, holding out her hand and saying, ‘How do you do, Mr. Wilbraham ? I am so glad to meet you again.’

Wilbraham started, and looked at her fixedly. He was a tall, well-built man, with a healthy red-brown complexion, and did not bear the appearance of being consumed by a hopeless passion. ‘I don’t know that I am glad,’ he answered gravely.

However, he took her hand, and then, as she retreated towards the sofa from which she had just risen, he followed her and seated himself in the vacant place by her side. There was an uncomfortable pause of a few seconds ; after which Wilbraham said, ‘I didn’t mean to be rude, Mrs. Vidal ; but if I was, perhaps you will forgive me. Some people can suffer in silence : I can’t. So after this I shan’t often speak to you, and you will understand why.’

Clare began to wish that she had contented herself with bowing to her former admirer. ‘I was very sorry,’ she murmured not knowing well what to say.

‘Oh, you couldn’t help it. It was my misfortune, but nobody’s fault. We won’t talk about that. They are making a lion of your husband, I hear.’

‘Almost too much of a lion,’ answered Clare with a laugh

and a sigh. ‘I don’t care for such constant racketing about ; although of course I am glad to think that his book has succeeded beyond our utmost hopes. Have you read it ?’

‘Yes—I read it,’ replied Wilbraham, with a certain hesitation. His manner said so clearly, ‘And I didn’t like it,’ that Clare rather indignantly asked, ‘*Why* didn’t you like it ?’

‘I did—in a way. I thought it a capital story, and very well written—only I wish he hadn’t put you into it.’

‘Put me into it ? I don’t understand you,’ said Clare.

Wilbraham stared. ‘Do you mean to tell me that you don’t recognise yourself in the heroine ! Why, it is you to the life !’

‘I am sure you are mistaken,’ answered Clare. ‘The heroine is a thousand times too good for me, and I don’t think it would ever have struck Adrian to take me as his model. But if he had, I should have been very much flattered. It would have been a great compliment.’

‘Ah, well ; perhaps so,’ said Wilbraham. ‘I am prejudiced, I suppose ; but to me there is something unpleasant in the idea of setting up a picture of your wife for the public to gape at. That is the worst of authors and artists. They lead a sort of double life, and in most cases, I think, the public half of it engrosses them more than the private. Everything that they see and hear, and everything that happens to them, is so much material to be worked up for future sale. I doubt whether their wives are often happy women.’

Clare was ready to pardon a good deal in Mr. Wilbraham, to whom she was conscious that she had not behaved over and above well ; but this speech seemed to her to border upon impertinence, and it was with an air of cold surprise that she answered, ‘I assure you I am perfectly happy.’

It was on the tip of her companion’s tongue to retort, ‘You don’t look so ;’ but he forbore. All that he said, after a short interval of silence, was, ‘You see, Mrs. Vidal, it doesn’t do for me to talk to you. I can’t keep my lips from evil-speaking. If I were magnanimous, I should congratulate you and say something pretty about your husband ; but I suppose I am not magnanimous. Honestly, I don’t like your husband ; though I don’t know him. And I don’t want to know him.’

It was at this opportune juncture that Vidal approached the sofa upon which his wife was seated. He had recognised, not without some inward amusement, the broad shoulders which he had first seen from the window of his bedroom at

Lucerne, and which had caused him to pass a bad five minutes there. He was glad to see that no ill-feeling existed between Clare and her rejected suitor ; and so far was he from suspecting that gentleman's uncompromising hostility to himself, that he had strolled up for the express purpose of obtaining an introduction to him.

After what Wilbraham had said, Clare was not very willing to perform this ceremony ; but when the two men were standing side by side she could hardly help making them known to one another, and she did so accordingly. Adrian bowed and half held out his hand, but withdrew it on perceiving that the other made no corresponding motion. He did not, however, imagine that Wilbraham intended to be unfriendly.

'We have met before,' he said pleasantly, 'though only for a moment. You were at Lucerne last year, you know, and so was I ; but I think you didn't stay more than one night.'

'I heard afterwards that you had been there,' answered Mr. Wilbraham stiffly ; 'I didn't see you at the time.—I think I must be moving on now, Mrs. Vidal ; it's getting late. Good-night.' He shook hands with Clare, favoured her husband with a nod and a grunt, and made his way towards the door.

'Your friend may have many sterling qualities, but his manners are not prepossessing,' remarked Adrian, with a laugh, when he and his wife were at home again.

Clare was lying back in a low arm-chair, her cheek supported by her hand. She glanced up, half apprehensively, at her husband, who was refreshing himself with a cooling drink after the fatigues of the evening. 'He was rather grumpy,' she said ; 'but you know, dear, you couldn't expect him to take very kindly to you just at first, could you ?'

Vidal threw up his eyes and his hands. 'Oh, the vanity of these women ! Do you suppose, madam, that that hale and hearty Philistine is pining away because you wouldn't marry him ? Do you think, pray, that after this long interval of time he is still in love with you ?'

'I know he is,' replied Clare quietly, 'because he told me so.'

'He did, did he ? Upon my word, you are a nice young woman ! May I ask whether this is the sort of discourse that you are in the habit of listening to when you retire so modestly into the background at evening parties ? One more illusion

gone ! I shall never believe in the pristine innocence of Cornwall again.'

'Oh, Adrian !' exclaimed Clare, in a low voice.

Her face was shaded by her hand. He stooped down, laughing, to look at it, and saw, to his amazement, that her lips were quivering, and that two big tears were ready to fall from her eyelashes. 'Why, my dear child,' he cried, 'what is the matter ? You can't think that I meant anything more than the most harmless of small jokes ! As if I wouldn't trust you with a thousand Wilbrahams ! Good heavens ! Clare, what absurd notion have you got into your head ?'

He was sorry that he should unwittingly have distressed her ; but he was also just a little bit provoked. To the male mind nothing is more incomprehensible than those sudden, causeless bursts of emotion in which women find relief for feelings of which we have no experience. A man doesn't, as a rule, shed tears unless he has something to cry about.

Clare made no reply, but when her husband bent over her and kissed her on the forehead, she placed her hands upon his shoulders and forced him gently down on to a footstool beside her. Then she threw her arms round his neck and began to weep hysterically. 'It's very silly, I know,' she sobbed out, 'but I can't help it—I am so tired ! Adrian, I want to ask you something—it was something Mr. Wilbraham said—and I am sure he didn't think it would hurt me—but he was talking about your book, and he said—he said the heroine was like me.'

Adrian could not help laughing a little. 'I am afraid I must plead guilty to having occasionally thought the same thing myself,' he answered. 'My heroine was intended to be as near perfection as possible, and I suppose that is why I have sometimes compared her to you in my mind. Was that an offence ?'

'Oh no ; only he said—and I remember having heard that before—that authors live as much in their books as in real life ; and perhaps—perhaps in the long run they get to care about the books most. The people in the books don't worry them ; they don't make fools of themselves, and cry about nothing ; when they are bores they can be put away on the shelf'—Clare broke off, straightened herself a little in her chair, and looked into her husband's face. 'I don't want to lose you !' she exclaimed piteously.

Well, certainly this was rather ridiculous. If your wife is

to begin being jealous of fictitious personages, where is she likely to stop? 'Really, Clare,' remonstrated Adrian, 'you are not reasonable. What do you wish me to do? To give up writing novels altogether?'

'No, no!' she answered, drying her eyes; 'of course not. I know I am not reasonable, and I can't say what I wish. Don't mind me.'

'Come!' said Adrian; 'there is something more than this upon your mind, only you won't speak it out, because you are a little goose.' He put his arm round her and drew her head down upon his shoulder. 'Tell me all about it,' he whispered.

But Clare could not tell him all about it just at once. It was only by degrees and with some incoherence that she confessed her various troubles—her wish that they could be more together, her dread of the allurements of society, and so forth. 'Sometimes horrid thoughts come into my mind,' she murmured, 'and I can't drive them away. You know so much more of the world than I do; and—and what your mother said at Brighton——'

'What did my mother say?' interrupted Adrian, with a shade of sternness in his voice.

'Nothing that I ought to have given a second thought to. It was only about your having had some flirtations before you were married. I suppose all men have flirtations. But she said that, as it happened so often, it was sure to happen again.'

The young man rose to his feet, and took a turn or two up and down the room. He was thinking how thankful he ought to be to Heaven for having given him so amiable and considerate a mother. It also occurred to him that a little more trust on the part of his wife would not have been amiss. 'Clare,' he said gently, at length, 'don't you think it will be time enough to distress yourself and me when I have given you some cause to do so?'

The justice of this plea was not to be denied. Clare admitted herself in the wrong, and begged forgiveness. 'Please, Adrian, don't think any more about what I said,' she entreated. 'I will never do it again if I can help it. I shouldn't have done it now if I had been myself, but I am not well.'

In truth, she was not well; and there were reasons for this with which Adrian was acquainted—reasons which were doubtless sufficient to account for a little fancifulness, and also

to render over-fatigue an undesirable thing for the patient. After that evening Mrs. Vidal went no more into society, the doctor having advised fresh air and early hours. Adrian offered to refuse all invitations for the future ; but perhaps he was not very sorry that his wife would not hear of his making such a sacrifice.

'It wouldn't be a sacrifice,' he said ; 'but I am not sure that I should be quite wise to let myself be forgotten. These people are my public, you see, and I want to stand well with them. Great novelists—men who appeal to the passions and emotions that are common to all humanity—can afford to snap their fingers at the fashionable world. They are always sure of a hearing. But it isn't so with me ; or at any rate, if it has been so in the case of one novel, it is not likely to be so again. I can't hope to be found permanently interesting outside a certain circle ; and within the limits of that circle I shall be ten times more read if I go about and show myself than I should be if I were never seen.'

Fortified by this reasoning, in which it must be admitted that there was a germ of truth, Mr. Vidal continued to be a welcome guest at the houses of the rich and great, and his wife did not vex him with any repetition of the painful and uncalled-for scene which has just been described. In the afternoons he generally took her out for a walk or a drive ; in the mornings he worked hard ; and often, when he came in late at night, he would sit up for an hour or two, correcting and revising what he had written. He had composed his article for the first number of the *Anglo-Saxon*, which was just about to appear, and had been blandly congratulated upon it by the editor of that journal. The hurry and stress of his life, which to many men would have been simply unendurable, suited him exactly. He thrived under it both in health and spirits ; he would not have changed places with the most wealthy of his entertainers ; in short, he was at this time so perfectly prosperous and happy that, if he had been of a superstitious turn, he might have feared that some misfortune was in store for him.

By way of proof that the lot of no mortal is wholly exempt from care, a rather disagreeable thing happened to him, late one afternoon as he was leaving his club. Some one who had seen him enter that establishment a quarter of an hour before, and had loitered patiently up and down Pall Mall until he came out again, followed him as he hurried towards the St.

James's Park station of the Underground Railway, by which he was in the habit of returning homewards, and caught him up just after he had passed Marlborough House. She was a handsome stoutish woman, with large black eyes and a fresh complexion. Her appearance was hardly that of a lady, although at a first glance she might almost have passed as one, for she was well and quietly dressed, and only certain deficiencies about the extremities would have betrayed her to one of her own sex. Her voice, too, when she addressed the object of her pursuit, was the voice of an educated person, harsh though it sounded at that particular moment.

'I've a word or two to say to you,' was her greeting, uttered somewhat imperiously, and she accompanied it by a smart tap upon Adrian's arm which caused him to start and wheel round at once.

'Susan!' he exclaimed; and his tone expressed more astonishment than delight.

'Susan it is,' replied the woman with the black eyes. 'Susan Bowman, at your service, Mr. Adrian Vidal.'

'Still Susan Bowman?' he asked, endeavouring to speak pleasantly.

'Still Susan Bowman, and likely to remain so—thanks to you.'

Vidal stroked his moustache and looked furtively up and down the Mall. He perceived that this interview was going to be a stormy one, and he had no wish to be accosted by any of his acquaintances while it lasted. 'I am rather in a hurry,' he remarked; 'still, if you really have anything particular to say to me, Susan——'

Susan nodded her head emphatically to signify that she had.

'Well, then, we may as well go into the Park and sit down. We can't talk very comfortably here.'

'As you please,' returned the other. 'I'm not ashamed to be seen by anybody; but I dare say you are. You've reason enough to feel ashamed of yourself, any way.'

Vidal did not defend himself against this accusation. He led the way silently into St. James's Park, sought out as sequestered a bench as could be found there, and when his companion was seated beside him, took up a conciliatory tone. 'Now, Susan, I hope there is no reason why you and I should not talk together for a few minutes without quarrelling. I am sorry you think that I ought to be ashamed of myself——'

'Don't *you* think so ?' interrupted the woman quietly.

'Yes,' answered Adrian, after a moment of consideration. 'One ought always to be ashamed of having been a fool, and I certainly made a great fool of myself about you. But I suppose that is not what you mean.'

'Not exactly. What I mean is that, if you had any shame in you, you would be ashamed of having ruined a poor girl who trusted you too well.'

'That is nonsense,' returned Adrian, rather sharply, 'and you know it. What is the use of saying such things ?'

'Did you swear to me, over and over again, that you loved me ?' demanded the woman.

'Yes, I'm afraid I did,' answered Adrian, with a retrospective shudder which he would have done more wisely to repress.

'Did you promise to marry me ?'

'Oh yes.'

'And did you go back from your word and desert me ?'

'I admit it all, Susan ; I have never denied it. But that is not what is generally meant by ruining a girl.'

'Isn't it indeed ?' retorted Susan, with a short laugh. 'In my rank of life we think ourselves pretty well ruined when our character is taken away ; and your mother turned me out of doors without a character. That was nothing to you, of course. You got rid of me, and it wasn't worth while to inquire whether I starved, or what became of me. A lady's-maid who is silly enough to believe in the honour of a gentleman deserves all that she gets. Isn't that so ?'

Adrian's conscience smote him. He knew that this woman had been nothing but a schemer, and that he, when a raw lad, had only been saved from becoming her dupe by Heriot's intervention. To say that he had deceived and deserted her was so misleading a statement of the truth as to be virtually false ; but it was quite true that he had never troubled himself to ask or think about what her fate was likely to be after she had been removed from his path ; and this, now that he came to reflect upon it, did not seem to have been altogether creditable conduct.

'Well, you know, Susan,' he said, 'I acted as I was advised to act. It was thought better that I should break off all communication with you. I never supposed that my mother had refused to give you a character.'

'I dare say she'd have told you, if you'd asked her,' ob-

served Susan curtly. ‘As for acting as you were advised, I wouldn’t boast of that if I were you. Why didn’t you take advice before you made love to me?’

Now, it was undoubtedly Susan who had initiated the love-making ; but Adrian did not care to urge this or other pleas that might have been brought forward in his defence. ‘Let it be agreed that I behaved ill about the whole business,’ he said, a little impatiently. ‘I presume you haven’t sought me out after all these years to reproach me with what is done and can’t be undone. It would be more to the purpose to tell me whether I can be of any assistance to you in the present.’

‘Oh, I’m not in want of five shillings, thank you,’ answered Susan, with a harsh laugh. ‘I’ve supported myself up to now without your help, and I shouldn’t wonder if I managed to go on. “All these years,” indeed!—do you know what I’ve been doing all these years? Why, I’ve been educating myself to be fit to be your wife. Yes, I didn’t give up hope ; because, you see, I didn’t know that your word counted for nothing. When we parted, you were too young to fight against your mother and your friends—Mr. Heriot showed me that plainly enough. I don’t bear any malice against him ; he treated me fairly and helped me with money out of his own pocket ; and it wasn’t to be expected that he should wish you to marry a lady’s-maid. But I thought to myself that things would be different some day. I’ve always been a little above the class that I was born into, and I knew that by the time you were able to think about marrying, I could make myself into as good a lady as any of them. And so——what are you laughing at?’ she asked, interrupting herself, and fixing a pair of angry black eyes upon Adrian’s face.

‘I was not laughing,’ he said.

‘You lie!’ shouted the woman, with a sudden outbreak of ferocity. ‘I saw you laugh.’

For a moment she looked very much as if she might be about to produce a knife or a revolver ; but this mood left her as abruptly as it had come, and she went on in her former ironical tone : ‘Well, it *was* a curious notion for such a low-born creature to delude herself with ; but I have been taken for a lady before now, all the same. I was in a situation as nursery governess not so long ago.’

‘How on earth did you contrive that?’ asked Adrian.

‘Never you mind ; that doesn’t concern you. I didn’t keep the situation long ; but I gave it up of my own free will, and

I'm a lady's maid again now, because I prefer it. I've had my ups and downs, and more than once I've been nearer the work-house than I liked ; but I've kept a good heart through it all till I heard of your marriage.' She paused a moment, and then added in a lower voice, 'I heard it too late or I'd have stopped it.'

'It is absurd to talk like that,' said Adrian. 'You must know perfectly well that you couldn't have stopped it.'

'Couldn't I ? I should have tried, anyhow. You sit there, with your nose in the air, looking at me as if I were a beggar ; but you can't have forgotten what we were to each other once. Do you remember holding me in your arms and kissing me and calling me your darling ? Do you remember swearing that you would stick to me through thick and thin ? Do you remember that ?'

Well, he did remember it ; and a most unpleasant recollection it was. He stole a glance at the handsome face beside him, which had once been more youthful, but which must always have been coarse, and the sense of shame and self-disgust which made him tingle all over was not of the kind that Susan desired to arouse in him. How Adrian, who was fastidious and refined in his tastes, had ever fallen in love with this dreadful person is one of those mysteries of human nature into which there is no occasion to pry too closely ; but he had been in love with her, and he could not help being angry with her for reminding him of the fact in so very plain-spoken a way.

'I don't want to talk about that time,' he said. 'I was young and foolish then, and I did a great many things that I had better have left undone. Fortunately for both you and me, I was prevented from carrying my folly to the pitch of insanity. You can hardly imagine that we should have been happy as husband and wife ?'

'But, you see, that is just what I do imagine,' returned Susan. 'I know I wasn't fit for you in those days ; but I've read and studied to make myself fit for you, and I'm no fool. You would have been as happy with me as with the woman you've married. By all accounts, she hasn't got much to show for herself beyond a pretty face.'

'Now look here, Susan,' said Adrian, 'I have listened to you patiently so far, but I don't care to have your opinion about my wife. Leave her alone, please, and tell me what you want of me.'

'Want of you?' repeated Susan, looking away, and seeming to speak more to herself than to her questioner. 'Ah, I can't say. I don't know exactly what I wanted of you when I followed you just now. But,' she added, turning upon him with a rather unpleasant smile, 'there's such a thing as revenge, Mr. Vidal; and I shouldn't mind paying you out for what you've made me suffer. Perhaps your wife isn't aware that you were once engaged to be married to one Susan Bowman. Ah, she isn't!—I thought not. Well, supposing I were to walk up to Alexandra Gardens, where you live, some fine morning, and tell her the whole of that pretty story? How should you like that?'

'I shouldn't like it at all,' answered Adrian candidly. 'It would cause both her and me annoyance, and would do you no good in the world that I can see.'

'I want to cause you annoyance,' returned Susan placidly. 'and that's why I shall be at your house in Alexandra Gardens before I'm much older.'

Now, there was a very simple and obvious way of taking all the sting out of this menace; but, unfortunately, Vidal could not bring himself to adopt it. Knowing how easily Clare's jealousy was aroused, and remembering what her state of health was, he felt that it would never do to tell her now what, possibly, he ought to have told her before. It would, of course, be highly illogical on her part to hold herself personally aggrieved by any faults or follies that he might have committed years before he had ever seen her; but the art of just reasoning is not a feminine attribute, and Clare had lately shown herself somewhat remarkably devoid of it. Moreover, at the bottom of his heart there lurked a strong disinclination to confess that he had once been eager to link himself for life to a domestic servant. Taking everything into consideration, therefore, it seemed to him the best plan to offer Susan all the money he had about him to leave him in peace.

He did this with as much delicacy as the case admitted of, and, rather to his surprise, Susan accepted his bribe at once. 'You must be very much afraid of your wife,' was her sole comment upon the transfer of eight pounds ten shillings from Adrian's pocket to her own.

'I am afraid of giving her pain,' answered Adrian briefly. 'And now I must wish you good-night,' he added, getting up. 'It is a pity you didn't tell me at the outset that you needed

money ; for I would very gladly have given you what I could afford, without being threatened. I am not a rich man ; but I have always thought that something ought to have been done for you, and I hope that if you are ever in want again, you will let me know. You had better address your letter to my club. Good-night, Susan, and good-bye. I trust it won't be very long before you meet some good fellow in your own—that is, some one much better suited to be your husband than I could ever have been.'

He hastened towards the railway station, feeling greatly relieved and somewhat tickled by this commonplace termination to an interview which had at one time seemed likely to enter upon a tragic phase. He might have been less easy in his mind had he known that Susan, when left alone, stood for full five minutes on the little bridge in St. James's Park, debating whether she should drop his money into the water or not. That she finally decided to keep it proved nothing, except a proper dislike on her part of wanton waste.

'So you think eight pound ten and a few civil insults payment enough for the likes of me, do you ?' she muttered as she resumed her walk. 'Very well ! But I'll be even with you yet, my gentleman. Thank you for showing me how to set about it.'

CHAPTER XVIII

SUSAN'S REVENGE

WHILE Miss Susan Bowman was hatching schemes of vengeance, and brushing her mistress's hair with unnecessary violence ; while the select portion of the public which calls itself society was criticising the first number of the *Anglo-Saxon* ; and while one of the contributors of that journal was complacently telling himself twenty times a day that the world was a pleasant place to live in, Mrs. Adrian Vidal was chiefly occupied in stitching at certain diminutive garments, which were hastily thrust under the sofa cushions when a visitor was announced.

We are often told that approaching maternity brings with it a peculiarly ennobling and purifying influence—that a

woman is never nearer Heaven than when this prospect opens before her, and a good deal more to the like effect. All this may be—and we will hope that it is—perfectly true. We may concede that a woman who doesn't like babies is an unnatural and rather shocking sort of woman ; and yet we may be allowed to doubt whether many women, when they marry, bestow much thought upon the ordinary consequence of marriage. Clare, at any rate, had not done so. This sitting at home, while her husband went out into the world, this anxious conning of household bills, this solitary and often apprehensive waiting for the unknown—well, perhaps it was the natural and fitting life for her to lead ; but it was not the life she had dreamt of on sunny summer days at Polruth. There were times when she was desperately lonely, and not a little homesick. It is not permitted to any one, however young, or however much in love, to break all at once and altogether with the past ; and there were many things that Clare missed, without knowing how much she missed them. She wanted her kind old fussy mother ; she wanted the boys ; she wanted space and liberty, and the fresh, healthy ring of young voices and laughter about her. And so it came to pass that from time to time a tear would splash down upon her sewing, and she had to take herself severely to task for a discontent which she acknowledged to be unjustifiable. The failure of previous dreams to fulfil themselves did not prevent her from continuing to dream as she sewed ; and lest she should fall too low in the estimation of mothers, it may be added that in these fanciful pictures of the future the coming tyrant played a very important part. Hope springs eternal in the human breast ; when one thing fails, another must needs take its place, or we could not go on living at all. It may be that Clare had some unacknowledged consciousness that 'baby fingers, waxen touches,' must be accepted as a substitute for certain ideals which can never be realised in this world.

And, after all, she was not lonely as most people count loneliness. In these days Adrian frequently asked a friend or two to dine with him quietly ; and it was with affectionate warmth that he congratulated his wife upon the excellent little dinners which she contrived to set before them. It pleased Clare that he should be pleased ; and it also pleased her to make the acquaintance of the colleagues whom he invited to his house, and who were entertaining enough in

their way. Some of them had wives, who called upon her, and every now and then a lady of fashion who had taken up Mr. Vidal would remember that Mr. Vidal was a married man, and would good-naturedly push a voyage of discovery as far as Alexandra Gardens.

Amongst these was one with whose condescension Clare could very well have dispensed ; but she was determined to conquer a distrustfulness which had caused her to act foolishly upon a previous occasion, and when Lady St. Austell, all smiles and geniality, was ushered into her little drawing-room, she did her best to respond to the kindness of her visitor's greeting. Lady St. Austell, who, for her part, thought Clare singularly uninteresting, disguised her sentiments as effectively and with as little exertion as usual.

'I have found you out, you see—or rather, I have found you in, which is so much nicer. What a pretty house you have got ! I met your husband the other night, and he told me your address. Why were you not with him ? You are not going out just now?—oh—h !' Her ladyship took in the situation, and looked sympathetic and just a shade contemptuous. She had never herself been debarred from the pleasures of society by any such cause, and she felt a sincere pity for less fortunate people. 'I was hoping that you would dine with us quite quietly some evening,' she went on ; 'but of course, if you think you had better not— Perhaps you will spare us Mr. Vidal, though ; we should be so glad to see him.'

Clare murmured that she was sure her husband would be most happy, and secretly hoped that her husband might be prevented by a previous engagement from accepting the threatened invitation.

The invitation, however, when it came, proved to be for an evening on which Adrian was not engaged, and he drove off to Grosvenor Square with anticipations of amusement which were amply fulfilled. Only seven people besides himself sat down round the oval table, and probably nobody's enjoyment was interfered with by the circumstance that the master of the house, who had gone to Newmarket, was not one of them. Lady St. Austell's guests were all young, and, judging by their conversation, were of a cheerful temperament. She herself was in high spirits, being—as she took an early opportunity of announcing—overjoyed to be back in London and among her friends once more.

After all, there is no place like it,' she said. 'One grumbles at London sometimes, and one is glad enough to get away when the end of July comes ; but one never really enjoys life, except by fits and starts, anywhere else. Mr. Vidal agrees with me ;—don't you, Mr. Vidal ? When I saw him last, he was talking of settling down in the deepest depths of the country ; but he has changed his mind, as I told him he would, and now I hope he won't think of going into exile again.'

'London couldn't get on without Mr. Vidal,' remarked one of Adrian's neighbours politely. 'What would become of the *Anglo-Saxon* if it lost its best man ?'

They had all seen the *Anglo-Saxon*, and had a great many questions to ask about it, although they evidently were not people whose tastes inclined them towards much reading. If their amiable intention was to give pleasure to the young writer, they were doubtless rewarded by perceiving their success. Lady St. Austell herself addressed the greater part of her remarks to him, treating him with easy familiarity, like an old friend. When dinner was over, she took him away into a corner, and said, 'Now tell me what you have been doing since that day when I went out fishing with you and lost my line. Oh, but I know, though ; you have been getting married, and honeymooning, and all that. How glad you must be that it is over !'

'I don't know that I am,' answered Adrian. 'Were you glad when your honeymoon was over ?'

'Glad was not the word ! I jumped for joy ; and so did Lord St. Austell. At least, he would have jumped if he hadn't had the gout so badly. I don't mean to say that it might not have been different if one had been in other company, though,' she added pensively.

'In Johnny Spencer's, for instance ?' suggested Adrian, who had found out that he could say what he liked to this lady.

She looked up interrogatively. 'Johnny Spencer ? Did I tell you anything about him ?'

'Yes ; down at Poltruth—don't you remember ? You told me a great deal about him. Everything, in fact.'

'Oh, did I ? Well, I am sorry to say that poor Johnny has become very stupid and dull. He turned up at Melton in the winter with his hideous wife, and I was quite shocked at the change in him. Marriage is the ruin of one's friends :

they might as well die at once, for any comfort that one gets out of their company afterwards.'

'And have you filled up his place?' asked Adrian, risking a second impertinence.

Lady St. Austell sighed. 'Not yet,' she answered, quite seriously. 'I still consider myself as being in a sort of way in mourning for him; though perhaps he doesn't deserve it.' She added, after a moment, 'Were you thinking of applying for the vacancy?'

Adrian was really not quite sure whether she was laughing at him or not; but he said, 'Oh, I am one of those who are as good as dead, you know. Besides, I doubt whether I should give satisfaction.'

'I am almost afraid you wouldn't,' Lady St. Austell agreed. 'In one sense you know too much, and in another, perhaps, you don't know quite enough. However, there is no reason in the world why we should not be friends.'

'None—if you honour me so far as to wish for my friendship.'

'Oh, the honour is all the other way. I have often wished so much to be upon terms of intimacy with an author; but, somehow, authors are generally rather impossible sort of people, and I have never got beyond distant civilities with any one of them. You are different. You belong to one's own class; or, at any rate, you behave as if you did.'

'Thank you very much,' said Adrian, who began to see that Lady St. Austell was quite as capable of uttering impertinences as of listening to them.

She laughed. 'Well, you understand what I mean. A man who knows nobody and goes nowhere may be a brilliant genius; but it isn't very easy to talk to him. Now, with you, I shall always be able to fall back upon gossip when I am tired of discussing novels. And that reminds me to say how much I enjoyed your last book. Your heroine was charming. Of course she was Mrs. Vidal?'

'So people tell me,' remarked Adrian. 'I wasn't aware of it until I was told.'

'See what it is to be in love! But you must try to fall in love with somebody else before you write another book, or you won't be able to give us the variety that we need. And variety is *the* thing to struggle after, both in novels and in real life. Don't you think so?'

When he reached home, Adrian did not give a verbatim

report of this and other speeches which Lady St. Austell made to him in the course of the evening. He thought that they might be open to misconstruction ; and Clare, who usually put him through a friendly cross-examination on his return at night, had not many questions to ask this time.

To Clare it was a matter of surprise as well as regret that her husband should like a woman whom she found so objectionable ; and that he did like Lady St. Austell was plainly to be seen from the reserve with which he spoke of her. She attributed this phenomenon in part to the workings of the artistic nature which, she presumed, must necessarily be attracted by a good subject, whether that subject be in itself a pleasing one or the reverse.

Not long after this a visitor remarked to her, casually, ‘I saw Mr. Vidal in the Park yesterday afternoon. He was driving in a victoria with a lady who, I was told, was Lady St. Austell, the wife of that dreadfully wicked old man. Is she a friend of yours ?’

‘Not exactly a friend,’ Clare answered. ‘We know her because my parents live near Lord St. Austell’s place in Cornwall.’

She managed to preserve an appearance of composure, and to give such information as she could to her visitor, who was very anxious to know whether Lord St. Austell was really as scandalous a person and as cruel a husband as he was said to be ; but inwardly she felt as if an icy hand had been laid upon her heart. Was Adrian beginning to have concealments from her, then ? Why had he not told her that he had been driving with Lady St. Austell ?

When he came in she put the question to him tranquilly, but so abruptly that he coloured and looked guilty. If he had replied, ‘Because you were so silly as to be jealous of her once,’ no harm would have been done ; but he judged it more prudent to say carelessly, ‘Oh, I don’t know ; I didn’t think it would interest you.’ Whereupon Clare left the room without making any rejoinder.

For the rest of the day she looked pale and miserable, and scarcely spoke ; while Adrian, who naturally felt himself aggrieved, did not choose to pave the way for a reconciliation. To sulk was not, however, in his nature. Late that evening, while he was sitting in his study, trying to work and finding work impossible, he said to himself that, at any rate, the beginning of an estrangement should not come from him.

Clare was utterly unreasonable ; but, when all was said, her unreasonableness arose from love. To understand is to forgive, and he understood his wife better than she understood him. He threw down his pen, stole upstairs to her bedroom, where he found her disconsolately adding up accounts, and said he had come to make friends.

' You little goose ! why do you create troubles for yourself out of nothing at all ? I went to leave a card in Grosvenor Square, and at the door I met Lady St. Austell, who said she was just starting for the Park and would give me a lift as far as Kensington Gardens if I was on my way home. So I said, " All right," and off we went. That was the beginning and end of the whole business. Now, don't you *think* you are rather a goose ? '

He fully expected that Clare would make the desired admission, and that the customary *redintegratio amoris* would ensue. He was, therefore, a good deal taken aback when she said, ' Adrian, will you do me a great favour ? I will never ask such a thing of you again—only this once. Will you, for my sake, give up Lady St. Austell altogether ? '

' No,' answered Adrian, quite good-humouredly, but firmly ; ' I will do nothing of the sort. Lady St. Austell has been kind to me, and to you too. I shall neither be so rude as to quarrel with her, nor so foolish as to quarrel with you on her account. If you could see her with my eyes, you would be the first to laugh at yourself for having been afraid of her ; but I am not going to say another word about the woman—what is the use ? Now go to bed, like a good girl, and let me get back to my work, or I shall be late with my copy again, and the editor of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* will tear me limb from limb.'

This off-hand way of dismissing the matter was so far successful that Clare smiled and allowed herself to be embraced. Nevertheless, after her husband had gone, she resolved that she would keep her word and never ask a favour of him again. It is difficult to be patient with those who meet trouble half-way, and it is easy to see the absurdity of instinctive antipathies. Yet a woman's instinct does not often lead her astray, and we, who are wise and guided solely by principles of common-sense in all our dealings, may perhaps afford to spare a little sympathy for foolish people like Clare Vidal, remembering that the trials which they bring upon themselves are not the less real because of their folly.

Not many days after Clare had been so deservedly worsted in her effort to set instinct above reason, a trial came upon her which to one of her mental tendencies was especially hard to bear. Had Adrian been at home when the second post came in, he would probably have seen from her face that something was the matter ; his inquiries would have elicited the truth, and a sufficiently clumsy attempt to sow discord between husband and wife would have been defeated. But, as ill-luck would have it, he had left the house, and it was in solitude that Clare opened and read the following precious missive :

'Do you know how your husband amuses himself when your back is turned ? Ask him how many times he has been in *Grosvenor Square* this week, and if he answers you truly he must have changed from what he used to be. You are not the first woman whom he has deceived, and you will not be the last. One who knows him well advises you to keep him at home if you can.'

Clare treated this anonymous letter as it is to be feared that very many of us treat such stabs in the dark. First, she examined it closely, and found that neither handwriting nor postmark afforded any clue to the identity of the writer. Then she indignantly tore it into fragments and threw it away from her, determining to think no more about it. And then she sat down and thought about it. Clare knew, as everybody knows, that anonymous letters can only be prompted by malice, and that the fact of their being anonymous is strong presumptive evidence that the matter which they contain is false. So far, so good ; but she could not help going a little farther and arguing that malice must have some cause or other for its existence. 'You are not the first woman whom he has deceived.' His own mother had said something very like this about him, and in that charge lay the poison of the letter. It had come, no doubt, from some woman who had been deceived, or considered herself to have been deceived, by Adrian in days gone by, and who was thus taking the first opportunity that offered to avenge herself upon him. Who was this woman ? The insinuation that Adrian was visiting Lady St. Austell more frequently than he confessed might or might not be founded upon fact. In any case Clare felt that she was bound to assume it to be untrue. The least that she could do (so she rather foolishly thought) was to say nothing to her husband about this backbiting communication, and to behave

as though it had never reached her. She despised herself for giving it a second thought ; but self-contempt does not always lead to change of conduct ; and so, while she condemned her suspicions, she brooded over them until she fretted herself into a fever.

Miss Susan Bowman possessed a fine supply of hatred and malice, and in the vengeance which she had sworn to wreak upon Vidal she was quite ready and willing to include Vidal's wife ; yet—since, with all her little defects, she was a woman—it is probable that she would not have despatched the document quoted above, had she been able to foresee all the consequences of that action. Adrian came home to find his small household in a state of the greatest confusion and alarm, and the doctor who had been summoned hastily, pulled a rather long face when he came out of Mrs. Vidal's room.

'I think you had better go downstairs for the present,' he said to Adrian. 'I will join you as soon as I am able to leave my patient ; but that may not be for some hours. Perhaps you would like to telegraph for Mrs. Irvine.'

'Is it so bad as that ?' gasped Vidal, turning white.

The doctor assumed that look of annoyed surprise which doctors generally do assume when such questions are addressed to them, and said, 'I understood that Mrs. Vidal wished her mother to be with her, that was all. Of course, this is happening a great deal sooner than it ought to have done, which gives us some additional cause for anxiety ; but I did not intend to imply anything more.'

Thereupon he withdrew hastily ; and Adrian, having despatched his telegram, betook himself to his study, where he sat, waiting and trembling, for an interminable hour. At last he heard a heavy footfall on the stairs, and presently the doctor entered, with a grave and sympathetic mien.

'I am sorry,' he began, 'that I am not the bearer of good news.'

Adrian started up and caught the man by the elbows. 'Well ?—what ?' he asked fiercely.

'I regret to say that the child was born dead. Under the circumstances that was only what might have been anticipated ; still—'

'Hang the child !' burst out Adrian. 'What about my wife ? Will she live ?'

The doctor disengaged himself, looking slightly shocked. 'Oh, I hope so—I quite hope so,' he replied. 'I have no

reason to think otherwise. But it is a great pity that matters should have fallen out like this. Can you account for it in any way? Has Mrs. Vidal had any shock?—any mental disturbance?

'None whatever, that I am aware of,' answered Adrian.

The doctor said no more, but appeared to be incredulous. Adrian saw that he thought there had been a quarrel between the young couple; but he did not care what the doctor thought, nor did it occur to him to make any inquiry as to the presumed shock which had deprived him of the joys of paternity. All that he thought of then and for the next three days was his wife's chance of recovery; and when she was pronounced to be out of danger, he could hardly contain himself for joy.

Clare, who was too weak to speak much, lay and watched his happy face with a smile of contentment upon her own. 'He must love me to be so glad,' she thought; and so long as he loved her, she asked for nothing more. She could have wished that he had been able to enter a little more into her feeling of disappointment about the baby; but it was hardly to be expected that a man should understand that. In reality, Adrian did, to some extent, understand what her feelings must be, but thought it better not to touch upon that subject. Personally, he shared the views of Mrs. Irvine, who concealed her own disappointment beneath a mask of cheerful volubility, and who confided to him that, much as she would have liked to be a grandmother, she could not but feel that this first member of the third generation had been rightly served for entering the world with such undue precipitancy.

'So inconsiderate of him!' she said. 'I dare say, if he had lived, he would have brought an immensity of trouble upon us all with his impetuous ways of going on. Even as it is, he has given me a dreadful fright, besides upsetting all my arrangements. I had promised myself a month in London towards the end of the season, and I thought that by the time Clare was strong again you would be ready for your summer holiday, and I could take you both back to Cardrew with me; but now I must return as soon as possible on account of a hundred things that have to be attended to at home; and as for nursing poor Clare and doing all that I want to do in London, it isn't to be thought of. So I have written to Mr. Irvine to come up. No, I won't have him in this house; he would only be in your way. He will stay in a little hotel

in Albemarle Street, where they know him and will look after him ; and then he must go about and do my commissions for me. A nice mess he will make of them, I am afraid, but we must hope for the best.'

In obedience to this summons, Mr. Irvine duly arrived in Albemarle Street, whence it was agreed that he was to journey out to Alexandra Gardens every morning to be informed of his daughter's progress towards recovery, and to receive his wife's orders for the day. As, however, he persisted in walking the whole distance, and as on three consecutive occasions he lost his way, and only appeared in tow of a friendly policeman at three o'clock in the afternoon, by which time he was far too exhausted to be sent anywhere, it was considered that time would be saved by sending him his daily instructions through the post for the future. In spite of the element of risk involved in such an arrangement (for the old gentleman never remembered to post a letter himself ; and when two or three days elapsed without news of him it was impossible not to fear that he might have been decoyed into a back slum and murdered), Mrs. Irvine adhered to it loyally, and only left her daughter's bedside when Clare insisted upon her giving herself a little fresh air.

Adrian, too, remained at home during the greater part of the twenty-four hours, neither dining out nor paying visits, and making the office of the *Anglo-Saxon* the sole object of his afternoon walk. However, when Clare was in a fair way towards convalescence, he bethought him that it would be only civil to call upon Lady St. Austell, who had sent repeatedly to inquire during Mrs. Vidal's illness, and from whom he had received various sympathetic little notes, to which he had replied, without thinking it necessary to mention them to the invalid. Turning into Grosvenor Square, one afternoon, to discharge this act of duty, he was surprised to see his father-in-law standing on the steps of the house for which he himself was bound. Mr. Irvine was apparently lost in thought, but recognised the new-comer with a gesture of delight.

'Dear me ! is that you, Adrian ? Now perhaps you will be able to help me out. I have, unfortunately, quite forgotten for the moment——'

'Where you are and what you came here for,' suggested Adrian, laughing. 'Well, I think I can tell you. You came here to call on Lady St. Austell, and you are now at her door.'

'Yes, yes ; I know that—I am quite aware of that ; and I can also recall the specific errand upon which I was sent by Mrs. Irvine. She has lately supplied Lady St. Austell with a maid—a most respectable person, who has seen better days, but is now in reduced circumstances—and I was to inquire how she was getting on. But my difficulty is this. If Lady St. Austell was not at home, I was to be sure to ask for the young woman herself, and unluckily her name has altogether escaped me. It couldn't be Arrowroot, could it ?'

'I shouldn't think so,' said Adrian.

'No ; and yet that can't be far from it, because all the way down Bond Street I was trying to fix it in my mind by repeating to myself "A was an Archer who shot at a frog." Now, the name was *not* Archer.'

'I don't see how that would help you towards Arrowroot, except that both words begin with an A,' remarked Adrian. 'Would the frog be of any assistance, do you think ?'

Mr. Irvine shook his head despondently. 'I doubt it. I can call to mind no English surname that is connected in any way with the idea of a frog, unless it be Tadpole, and I should be sorry to assert positively that such a name as Tadpole exists. Added to which, Tadpole is certainly not the name of the young person.'

'That being so, suppose we ring and ask for the new maid.'

'To be sure !' cried Mr. Irvine gleefully. 'We will do so without loss of time. What a fortunate thing that you should have arrived at this moment ! You are always so fertile in expedients.'

Adrian accordingly rang the bell, and during the interval that elapsed before the door was opened he had leisure to reflect that, from his point of view, it was perhaps not such a very fortunate thing that he had encountered his father-in-law at that particular time and place. He had not said, before leaving home, that he intended calling upon Lady St. Austell, and would have been just as well pleased that the circumstance should not be reported. His musings were interrupted by a sudden exclamation from Mr. Irvine.

'Bowman !' called out the old gentleman triumphantly. 'Susan Bowman, of course ! I knew it had something to do with archery. Now do you see the beauty of this system of *memoria technica* ? It not only enables you to recall the particular word that you wish to retain, but it exercises the deductive and inductive faculties——'

But the remainder of Mr. Irvine's speech died away upon his lips when he discovered that his hearer had vanished, as if by enchantment.

Adrian was, indeed, at this moment posting along Upper Brook Street, uttering muffled execrations at every step. Susan Bowman in Lady St. Austell's service ! Here was a pretty piece of business ! 'No more visits to Grosvenor Square for *me* !' thought he to himself. 'That dear old mother-in-law of mine is the best of women, but she is not happy in her choice of objects for benevolence. I suppose the next thing will be that she will hear the whole of Susan's sad story, with additions and embellishments. Heaven grant that the woman may not have found out Clare's maiden name ! It is this sort of disastrous thing that makes one doubt whether Providence can really take any active part in the government of human affairs.'

The wicked flee when no man pursueth. Perhaps so ; but there have been circumstances under which the righteous have been known to adopt the same inglorious system of strategy. It cannot be said that Adrian had behaved wickedly towards Susan Bowman ; yet so terrified was he at the prospect of a second encounter with her that he was half way across Hyde Park before he realised that he had done a rather stupid thing in decamping without assigning any cause for his retreat. It would have been so simple to have been taken ill, or to have remembered an appointment ! However, there was no use in thinking about that now, and he could but trust that Mr. Irvine's treacherous memory might fail to retain the circumstances of their meeting and parting. What was more important was that a woman who ardently desired to do him an ill turn was residing in the house which, of all houses in London, seemed the most likely to furnish her with means to effect her purpose ; and as he thought of the complications that might arise out of this most unlucky accident, Adrian almost made up his mind that he would not only steer clear of Lady St. Austell for the future, but would frankly tell his wife the whole history of that boyish adventure which had so nearly prevented her from ever becoming his wife at all.

That he did not, in the sequel, carry out this sensible determination was due to a succession of those second thoughts which are not always the best. He had a good many reasons for holding his tongue. No man likes to confess (except in general terms) that he has been an egregious ass ; very few

men care to run the risk of a scene which may be avoided ; and if it only cost an occasional ten-pound note to keep Susan quiet, occasional ten-pound notes might very well be forthcoming in these palmy days of literary success. Moreover, when he had regained full possession of his senses, Adrian reflected that the chance of a visitor to a large establishment being seen by the lady's maid was not to be reckoned, upon the average, at a much higher rate than one in fifty ; and that, as he had escaped recognition hitherto, it was most probable that he would continue to do so. To all this it may be added that he did not want to break with Lady St. Austell.

Had he been a little better acquainted with the habits both of Lady St. Austell and Susan, he might have spared himself the trouble of debating whether or not it behoved him to be cautious about calling in Grosvenor Square. The former of these women was at all times possessed by so irresistible a craving to talk about herself that it would have been impossible for any one to brush her hair every evening without hearing all that she knew as to the person who had the privilege of exciting her interest for the time being : the latter had an insatiable thirst for information, having long since discovered ways in which miscellaneous information may be turned to account. Susan, therefore, was perfectly aware not only that Adrian was the son-in-law of the lady who had provided her with her situation, but also that Mrs. Vidal was rather prone to be jealous of her husband, and that Lady St. Austell was by no means disinclined to give her good cause for being so.

This was most satisfactory, and Susan began to see her way to paying off old scores in that time-honoured fashion which ought always to fail, yet so seldom does fail. That Mrs. Vidal might very possibly show the anonymous letter which she had received to her husband was a contingency in no wise to be dreaded. The writer did not care in the least whether she was identified by Adrian or not ; for, since her interview with him, she had felt assured that he lacked the requisite courage to speak the truth about his past. He would, therefore (so she calculated), meet this charge with a blank denial—which denial would be only half believed in. He would not cease to visit Lady St. Austell ; but henceforth he would do so more or less on the sly, and sooner or later he was quite sure, if not to compromise himself, at least to place himself in a compromising situation. Thus there was good

ground for hope that ere long he might be made acquainted with the sweet uses of adversity. In the meantime it was not desirable that he should be put upon his guard by knowledge of his enemy's whereabouts, and that knowledge Susan accordingly determined to withhold from him. Should he by any chance acquire it, she would still have the whip-hand of him ; for she had preserved certain affectionate letters of his, written in bygone days, and she was not without hope that, as time went on, she might do still better, and possess herself of similar missives addressed to Lady St. Austell. It will be perceived that Miss Bowman was neither over-strict as to her own moral code nor disposed to form too lofty a notion of that of her neighbours.

'She is,' said Mrs. Irvine, speaking of her to Adrian at this time, 'one of the most interesting and unfortunate creatures I have ever met. I would have tried to place her as a governess ; but she said she really would prefer being a maid, and one can't wonder that she should, poor thing ! Nowadays so much is expected of governesses, that she could not hope to be entrusted with the care of any but quite small children ; and, as she very truly said, it is better to be a lady's maid than a nurse. I don't think there are any people in the world whom I pity so much as those who are thrown upon their own resources after having been brought up as ladies and yet insufficiently educated.'

'I suppose you satisfied yourself that she *had* been brought up as a lady,' said Adrian, to whom all this was very unpleasant hearing.

'Well, she said so,' answered Mrs. Irvine, as if that were quite conclusive ; and added, after a moment, 'Sometimes I feel almost inclined to give up belonging to charitable organisations altogether : they seem to make people so hard and suspicious. This poor woman came to the office of our Society for the Aid of Decayed Gentlewomen, and they would have nothing to say to her because she couldn't produce any relations to answer for her. Now, how is one to produce people who are dead and buried ? One can't dig them up out of their graves ; and she did offer to show us their tombstones, which Lady M'Cleverty said was so impertinent of her, though I really could not see myself why it was impertinent. She told me her whole story, which was really a very sad and touching one. The lady with whom she lived first, after her parents died, turned her out of doors and refused to help her

to another place because she had been unfortunate enough to attract the attention of this lady's son—a dissolute and unprincipled young man. Then, I think, she said she had been a dressmaker, and—well, I don't remember all her adventures ; but she managed at last to get a situation as nursery governess, and only left it because she could not endure the vulgarity of the people.'

Adrian groaned. 'And upon the strength of that unsupported testimony you recommended her to Lady St. Austell ?'

'It wasn't unsupported. I had a character of her from the people with whom she had been last. Not a very good character, I must admit ; but it was easy to see that the woman who wrote it was prejudiced against her. At any rate, Lady St. Austell is quite satisfied.'

Adrian did not care to pursue the subject. It was a relief to him to find that he had not yet been betrayed, and it was also something of a relief to him when Mrs. Irvine left for Cornwall. 'If there is to be a disturbance,' thought he, 'the fewer there are of us to take part in it the better.'

But before very long all dread of a disturbance left him. Susan made no sign, and Clare, though a little depressed—as was but natural, after all that she had gone through—was almost herself again, and seemed to have forgotten the unreasoning repugnance that she had felt for Lady St. Austell. In reality, Clare had forgotten nothing ; but Adrian's care of her during her illness had made her so heartily ashamed of having doubted him that she was eager to show her penitence by urging him to go out into the world again—which thing, to tell the truth, he was ready to do without any great pressure. She herself did not yet feel equal to the fatigue of being entertained again ; so she remained at home, counting the days till August, in the beginning of which month Adrian was to take her down to Cardrew, and sometimes wishing that she had a friend with her to keep her company and aid the flight of time.

CHAPTER XIX

GEORGINA

CLARE's modest aspiration for a little company was gratified in an unexpected manner by the sudden appearance upon the scene of Adrian's sister. It was Miss Vidal's habit to arrive from remote quarters of the globe during the progress of the London season ; for she combined a taste for savage life with a genuine appreciation of humanity in its higher phases of development ; and, indeed, at the bottom of her heart she agreed with Lady St. Austell that there was no place in the world like the capital of her native land. She was shown into Clare's drawing-room one afternoon when Adrian was out, and introduced herself, remarking as tranquilly as if she had just come up from the country, instead of from the South Seas, 'I shall only be in town for a few weeks, so I thought I wouldn't lose time in calling upon you.'

Clare looked at this tall, fair-haired, and rather handsome woman, who had a pair of frank, good-humoured eyes, and took a fancy to her at once. In face she was not unlike her brother, whose senior she was by a year or two ; but her manner was her own, and, in spite of a certain abruptness, it was not an unpleasant manner.

'I have heard all about you from my mother,' she said ; 'so I feel that you are not quite a stranger. My mother's report was very complimentary, which is more than can be said for most of her reports. By-the-by, did she tell you anything about me ? I hope not.'

Clare took a second look at Miss Vidal, who was seated opposite to her, with her hands upon her knees and her elbows squared out. The attitude was perhaps a slightly masculine one, and the speaker had the appearance of being accustomed to use her limbs more freely than women generally do ; but there was nothing unconventional about her attire. Her dress was well cut, and fitted her neat figure perfectly ; her boots and gloves were all that they ought to have been, and she had a parasol with a long handle, just like everybody else. Remembering quite well the picture drawn by Mrs. Vidal of her daughter, Clare smiled and only replied, 'She told me you were in the South Sea Islands.'

'Nothing more than that? Are you sure she didn't tell you that I had become a convert to cannibalism! The year before last, when I came back from Africa, I was asked by half a dozen people whether it was true that I had shot a native chief and taken command of his tribe; and when I inquired where they got their information from, they all with one consent replied, "From your mother." I call that rather hard. However, as she often tells me, one can't conceal one's self in the wilds for months together and then expect that no strange assertions will be made about one's proceedings. She herself can't make out why I go to such places, or what I do when I am there; but she has a general impression that I am up to no good. This time I am going to stop the mouth of calumny by publishing a book full of interesting information, which I am afraid you will have to read.'

Clare said, politely, that she was sure she would enjoy reading it.

'I don't feel quite so confident about that: other people's travels always strike me as so extraordinarily wearisome. But there are tiresome duties connected with every position, and domestic criticism appears to be one of yours. It is rather bad luck for you to have to encourage an illiterate sister-in-law as well as a literary husband. Does Adrian make you read all his novels in manuscript?'

'He doesn't *make* me; he *allows* me to read them,' answered Clare.

Miss Vidal laughed. 'I apologise. It's a privilege, of course. I don't know what you will think of me when I confess that I haven't seen either of his books yet. My only excuse is that it takes some time for recent works to reach Ctaheite.'

'Do you really like going to such far-away countries all by yourself?' asked Clare.

'Yes, I think I do. Upon the whole, I like it much better than I expected that I should. I don't know that I have any very great natural love of adventure; but when it is a choice between Brighton and barbarism, one can't hesitate. One gets a little tired of wandering about the earth's surface; but, things being as they are, I suppose I shall continue to do so till the end of the chapter.'

'I hope not,' said Clare, to whom this seemed a dismal prospect. 'You may have a home of your own some day.'

'I may marry, you mean? Well, I may; but it isn't very

likely. Whenever I have contemplated anything of the kind I have found myself confronted by a dilemma from which there is no escape. I shouldn't like a husband who made me obey him, and I should rather despise a husband who obeyed me. Therefore I remain unfettered.'

'And where are you staying now ?'

'Oh, in lodgings. It isn't quite the thing, I know. One is allowed to dispense with a chaperon in the Southern Hemisphere, but not in London. Still, I must see my friends occasionally ; and, as my mother declares that she can't afford three weeks in town, I have to defy public opinion and come up alone.'

'But why did you not come to us ?' asked Clare. 'Was it because we live in such an out-of-the-way quarter ?'

Miss Vidal looked half pleased and half amused. 'You are very kind,' she said, 'and I don't call South Kensington at all out of the way. But, barbarian though I am, I don't make a practice of inviting myself to stay with people who have never asked me.'

'Not even with your brother ?' exclaimed Clare. 'Why, if one of the boys came up to London I should expect him here as a matter of course ; and if I were unmarried and had a married brother I should think I was paying him a very poor compliment by taking lodgings when he had a spare room to give me. You don't know what a kindness you would do me if you would make this house your head-quarters as long as it suits you. Adrian is obliged to be a great deal away, and lately I have often wished for somebody to talk to while he is out. Of course, though, if you do consent to move here, I shall not expect you to sit with me all day long. You will come and go exactly as you please, and nobody will ask you to do anything that you don't feel inclined to do. Please think it over.'

Miss Vidal, as in duty bound, resisted for a time ; but her resistance was not very strenuous ; and while she was allowing her scruples to be removed, one by one, Adrian came in and settled the matter by adding his entreaties to Clare's. He was fond of his sister, and, being for his own part honestly glad to see her again, he rejoiced to find that his wife was amiably disposed towards her.

'You may as well yield gracefully, Georgie,' he said. 'You can't pretend that you prefer poky lodgings to this palatial residence, or your own society to ours. We have just

been entertaining Clare's mother, and it's only fair that my side of the family should have a turn now.'

So Miss Vidal became a temporary inmate of the little house in Alexandra Gardens, and did a good deal towards rendering it more cheerful for one of its occupants. It is not always that sisters-in-law hit it off together ; but these two speedily became friends—perhaps because each found in the other the qualities which were wanting in herself. The elder of them was one of those happy persons who, being blessed with a perfectly healthy organisation, do not know what it is to be weary or bored, and who consequently very seldom bore their neighbours. There was a brisk good-humour about her and a determination to make the best of everything which were as good as a tonic to her younger companion, who had gradually fallen into a condition of languor for which her late illness was hardly sufficient to account. Miss Vidal had little personal knowledge of sentimental troubles ; but she had sharp eyes, and it is probable that she formed a pretty shrewd guess at the nature of a complaint which did not admit of verbal consolation.

There is not much to be said to those who persist in mourning for the dead, and there is still less to be said to the foolish people who won't understand that courtship and marriage are two distinct things. A little oblivion is the remedy which most commonly suggests itself to bystanders ; and it may be that Clare, who did not know what was the matter with her, and had no suspicion that she was being put through a course of treatment, may have been unconsciously benefited in this way by being dragged about to concert-rooms, exhibitions, and other places of amusement. 'You must remember that I am a country cousin,' the indefatigable Georgina would say ; 'and I want to be shown the sights.'

She had, apparently, a large number of friends, who met her, either by accident or appointment, at picture galleries and elsewhere, and who walked about with her while her sister-in-law rested. In one of these Clare was especially interested—not so much on account of his physical or mental attributes, neither of which were of a striking order, as by reason of the obvious and profound admiration which he entertained for Miss Vidal. Georgina introduced him to her casually, one day, as 'My friend Mr. De Wynt. Mr. De Wynt is a clerk in the Treasury, and has no peculiarities of any sort or kind.'

This description of himself did not seem to be resented by the subject of it, who was a dapper little man of something over thirty, with fair hair, very smoothly brushed, and a carefully trimmed beard.

'Some of us can't afford to be peculiar,' he remarked placidly. 'Miss Vidal, of course, can ; but if I were to set up for being original, I should lose all my friends at once. I mean to say, they simply wouldn't stand it, you know. Ask any one of my acquaintances whether he knows me, and I can tell you exactly what his answer will be. He will smile and say, "De Wynt ? Oh yes ; I know him. He isn't a bad little chap." But supposing that I attempted to strike out a line of my own, what would be the result ? Why, that I should be known as "that thundering little idiot De Wynt." And I would rather not be spoken of in that way.'

'He plays the piano,' observed Georgina, as if thinking it only fair that her friend should be credited with any little claim to distinction that he might possess.

'Well, yes ; I play the piano ; but I trust that there is nothing very peculiar in that. My playing is bad, certainly, still not so bad as to be phenomenal.'

'His playing is really rather good,' Miss Vidal said. 'You can come and see us some afternoon, Mr. De Wynt, if you like, and bring your music with you under your arm. Do you mind carrying a roll of music through the streets ?'

'I don't like it,' answered De Wynt ; 'it makes one look so like a singing-master, don't you know. But I'll come in a hansom, if Mrs. Vidal will allow me to call upon her.'

He redeemed his promise within a few days, and was received with much cordiality by Clare, who had made up her mind that this sensible little gentleman would make the best husband in the world for her sister-in-law. His behaviour on this and on subsequent occasions left no room for doubt as to the fact of his attachment to Miss Vidal, whom he adored silently and placidly, and who treated him with a good-humoured imperiousness to which he did not appear to object. He was very glad to do her errands, to look after her when she wanted an escort, and to make himself generally useful ; and if he did not demean himself in all respects like a lover, it was Clare's opinion that he was only restrained from doing so by fear of the lady whom he loved.

She said as much, one day, to Georgina, who either was, or affected to be, greatly amused by this assertion, and exclaimed,

'Poor Mr. De Wynt ! he little suspects that he has been decoyed into the house of a match-maker. I hope you won't be so unkind as to deprive me of his services by saying anything of this sort to him. If you do, he will take to his heels at once ; for he has considerable expectations, I believe, and is altogether rather an eligible little person in his way. It wouldn't suit him at all to be mated with a strong-minded female of eccentric habits.'

'You know perfectly well that he is devoted to you,' returned Clare, 'and I believe you like him too. Some day, when you are tired of roaming about the world, you will be sorry for having snubbed a man who asks for nothing better than to make you happy.'

But Miss Vidal shook her head. 'I told you before,' said she, 'that I shouldn't like either to be a slave or a slave-owner. I never snub Mr. De Wynt, whom I think a most amiable and estimable being ; but I have received no offer from him, and if I had I shouldn't have accepted it—as people say when they haven't been asked to a party. And, talking of that, have you made up your mind to accept Lady St. Austell's invitation ?'

This change of subject had the effect, which it was probably designed to have, of diverting Clare's thoughts into another channel. The invitation alluded to had reached her that morning, and had brought about a discussion across the breakfast-table between her and her husband, which, though brief, had not been altogether pleasant.

Lord St. Austell possessed, on the banks of the Thames, near Richmond, a small house with large grounds attached to it, where his wife was in the habit of holding an annual garden party. It was by no means everybody who received a card for these functions, at which Royalty was always largely represented, and upon which the giver spared neither trouble nor money. Lady St. Austell was exclusive once a year upon much the same principle as causes proprietors of private roads to close their gates for a few hours at stated intervals. She thought it incumbent upon her to make an occasional public assertion of the position in society that she was entitled to claim ; after having done which she would return to the easy-going habits that were more congenial to her nature. Now, Adrian had not felt at all sure that he would be included among the distinguished guests bidden to Richmond, and in proportion to his pleasure at being thus

honoured was his annoyance when his wife expressed a decided wish to send a refusal. Understanding, as of course he did, what was Clare's reason for disliking to partake of any hospitality in that quarter, he could not repress a gesture of impatience as he said :

'There is no need to send any answer at all. Perhaps, when the time comes, you may want to go. I shall be sorry if you don't, because Lady St. Austell has gone out of her way to be civil to us more than once, and if she notices our absence she will most likely think that it isn't worth her while to trouble herself about us any more.'

Such an eventuality would not have grieved Clare ; but she felt that she had no right to bring it about. She had been too proud to question Adrian as to his visits to Grosvenor Square, but she had not been too proud to put together certain scraps of circumstantial evidence which convinced her that they had been resumed ; nor, unfortunately, had she sufficient self-command to abstain from such futile indications as this of her distrust of the woman whom she regarded as his would-be beguiler. After having needlessly vexed him by entering her protest, she began to feel qualms of conscience and prepared to yield. Some pressure was brought to bear upon her by Miss Vidal, who knew of no just cause or impediment why advantage should not be taken of Lady St. Austell's politeness ; and this provided her with a sort of excuse for surrender.

'I have decided to go to that garden party, after all ; Georgina would like to see it,' she said afterwards to Adrian, who accepted the explanation without comment, his one wish being to avoid all mention of a subject which seemed likely to lead to unpleasantness.

If Clare's self-sacrifice won her no thanks from her husband, it met with grateful recognition from De Wynt, who had hardly anticipated that the ladies in whose company he had latterly spent all his spare time would be present at the Richmond gathering, nor indeed (if the truth must be told) that they would be asked to be present. He knew that Clare was not fond of society, and he also knew that Lady St. Austell made it a rule to ask no one who was not in society to this especial entertainment. He himself had received an invitation as a matter of course, because he always did receive invitations to everything that was going, and there were very few notices of parties recorded in the papers that chronicle such events in

which the list of guests did not terminate with ‘Mr. De Wynt, &c.’ To what he owed so much honour it would be difficult to say exactly. Possibly, as he was himself wont to aver, to his unobtrusiveness.

‘It’s awfully good of you to go to this thing, Mrs. Vidal,’ he said. ‘You won’t enjoy yourself, but you will give enjoyment to other people, and that is your notion of happiness, I know.’

In truth Mr. De Wynt had formed an exalted idea of Clare’s character, which he did not disguise.

‘Georgina will enjoy it, I hope,’ she answered, with a smile.

‘I was thinking of myself, I confess ; but perhaps she may enjoy it too. I am not sure whether she cares much about meeting Royalties and Duchesses.’

‘I fancy that perhaps she is a little above caring to meet people who have nothing beyond a title to recommend them,’ observed Clare, who wanted to represent her sister-in-law in as flattering colours as possible.

‘Well, you know, I think that’s rather a pity,’ said the little man. ‘It’s all very well to be unconventional ; but it seems to me that if one doesn’t allow that rank carries a certain distinction with it, one might as well be a Republican at once ; and we’re not Republicans in England yet, don’t you know. Of course, there are plenty of yeomen and any number of country gentlemen who could show longer pedigrees than some of the people who lead society nowadays—and then there’s the aristocracy of talent, and all that. But it’s a mistake to turn up one’s nose at these people, who think themselves our superiors, and to pretend that one doesn’t want to be asked to their houses. At least, I think it is ; but then I suppose I am rather a snob in some ways,’ he added reflectively.

Clare had no difficulty in reading between the lines of this harangue. Mr. De Wynt was above all things a prudent man; and, in spite of his admiration for Miss Vidal, he was probably quite alive to the disadvantages of having an eccentric wife. It was not, however, very likely that Georgina’s eccentricity would take the democratic form which he deprecated ; nor, so far as Clare could judge, was he likely to be deterred from offering her his hand and heart by anything except a sense of his own unworthiness. She had scarcely any doubt but that this couple would come to an understanding sooner or later, little though they seemed disposed to hurry themselves over it. It amused her to watch them together ; and she had ample

leisure for watching them and others at Lady St. Austell's garden party, for nobody took much notice of her there.

Her husband found her a seat on the sloping lawn, whence, as he said, she could 'survey the show ;' and she sat and surveyed the show accordingly, being very well satisfied to take that passive part in the proceedings. The scene was certainly the most effective that she had witnessed in her brief experience of London society. Under the shade of cedars and copper beeches, and among flower-beds blazing with scarlet and blue and a hundred other tints, were congregated some of the prettiest and best-dressed women in England. The river, like a broad band of silver, made a background for all this colour, and the sunny, hazy atmosphere softened down what was too crude in it. Lady St. Austell was standing at the entrance of a marquee, surrounded by exalted personages, while in the shadow behind her hovered her lord, an indistinct figure, all teeth and eye-glass. Georgina and De Wynt were pacing up and down one of the paths, the latter taking off his hat at every other step and evidently rejoicing in the recognitions accorded to him. Adrian, who was flitting about from group to group, appeared to be in the full enjoyment of the same innocent pleasure.

Upon all this Clare looked down with an odd sensation of being out of it, of being set aside, of having neither part nor lot in the existence which her husband found so charming. Every now and then, someone whose face she had vaguely remembered to have seen in the far-away time before her illness bowed and passed on ; one or two people stopped to shake hands with her : but, as she could think of nothing to say to them, they did not linger long beside her. No doubt it was her own fault if she was isolated ; but that did not prevent her isolation from becoming a little depressing in the long run, and the unexpected appearance of an old friend among all those strangers brought a flush of pleasure to her cheeks, and caused her to start up impulsively from her chair to meet him.

' You back in England, Mr. Heriot ! ' she exclaimed ; ' and you have never been to see us ! '

' I only returned the day before yesterday,' answered Heriot, into whose sallow face a slight accession of colour had also found its way, ' and I should have called upon you to-day if Lady St. Austell hadn't told me that I should meet you here.'

'You went to see Lady St. Austell first, then ?' cried Clare petulantly. 'What is there in Lady St. Austell that fascinates you all so much? Are you, too, among her adorers ?'

The moment that she had uttered this somewhat injudicious speech she would have been glad to recall it; but Heriot was discreet enough to let it pass. He began to talk about other things—about his own travels during the winter, about Adrian's successes, and about Cornwall, which last theme was always a welcome one to Clare. Her eyes brightened as she said: 'We are going home—to Cardrew, I mean—early in August, and if you want to be charitable, you will come and stay a long time, and keep Adrian from being bored. This year we shall have plenty of room, because Bob is away on the East Indian station, poor fellow, and Jack is going to Norway to fish. We shall miss them both a good deal; still we shall be a tolerably large party without them, and it will be like old times again, I hope. You will be sure to come, won't you ?'

'Well, perhaps I will, if I am asked,' answered Heriot. 'And how do you like the gay world now? When I saw you last, you told me that you were dying to make acquaintance with it. Do you remember ?'

'Yes;—it seems a long time ago,' sighed Clare. 'So much has happened since then.'

Heriot made a sort of sympathetic murmur. He took it for granted that she was alluding to the loss of her baby, and was not sure whether outspoken condolence with regard to such a subject would be considered in very good taste. But in truth it was not of that only that Clare was thinking.

'Do you know,' she went on, 'I don't like the gay world at all. I am not fitted for it, and—and it isn't exactly what I thought it would be. Lately I have not been able to go out much myself; but Adrian does. Sometimes I almost wish——'

She did not finish her sentence; but the blank was easy enough to fill up. Heriot quite understood it all. What he had foreseen had evidently come to pass, and he was sorry for it; yet he did not think it advisable to encourage vain repinings. 'I am glad you can persuade Adrian to go about without you,' he said cheerfully. 'Married men are far too apt to get into a lazy way of falling asleep after dinner, and refusing to stir from their arm-chairs, when they ought to be

gathering fresh ideas by mixing with their fellow-creatures I grant you that historians and philosophers may shut themselves up without injuring the quality of their work very much; but a novelist can't see too many people.'

'I dare say you are right,' replied Clare rather coldly. Mr. Heriot might have spared her that hint that she had no business to monopolise her husband, she thought. She had not meant to complain, and felt that she had been undeservedly snubbed. After this she fell back into silence and apathy, thereby causing her old friend to anathematise himself inwardly for having been such an ass as to interfere with what did not concern him.

'Now that you have successfully put your foot into it,' thought he to himself, 'the sooner you go away the better.' And before very long an opportunity for withdrawing was afforded him by the approach of Lord St. Austell, who passed him with a nod and took a chair on Mrs. Vidal's left hand.

Lord St. Austell, set free by the departure of his Royal guests, had for the last quarter of an hour been prowling about the grounds, like a superannuated knight-errant in search of adventures, and had been pleased by the discovery of an extremely pretty face, which he indistinctly remembered to have seen somewhere before. Pretty faces were to him what the magnet is to iron, and having found, upon inquiry, that this one belonged to 'Mrs. Vidal—wife of the man who writes the books, you know,' he advanced towards Clare with a grin of satisfaction not unlike that with which an aged wolf may be supposed to contemplate a lamb. De Wynt, who noticed his proceedings, said to Georgina, 'Look at old St. Austell making up to your sister-in-law. He must have thought of something very disagreeable to tell her, or he wouldn't be looking so pleased.'

But Lord St. Austell, as he seated himself, said nothing more disagreeable than 'Mrs. Vidal, I want to know who your dressmaker is?'

'I don't think you would be much the wiser if I were to tell you,' answered Clare laughing. 'She is not a fashionable dressmaker.'

'She has managed to turn you out better than anyone else here, at all events,' returned Lord St. Austell; not because he thought so, but because experience had led him to believe that no woman living doubts the sincerity of this particular form of flattery. 'To be sure,' he added, 'she had an admirable

subject to exercise her skill upon, and that counts for something. If I were a dressmaker, I should charge all the ugly women double prices.'

I am afraid they wouldn't employ you long upon those terms,' remarked Clare.

'I shouldn't want them. I hate ugly women. I should devote myself to—well, to the ones who are like you ; and I should never send in my bill unless I was sure that their husbands would discharge all claims without making a fuss. I hope you make yours pay up handsomely, by the way.'

'I don't think I care much about dress,' answered Clare, who felt that the old gentleman was becoming a little impertinent, but did not quite know how to set him down, 'and my husband has not a superabundance of spare money. Why are you so anxious that he should spend it upon my clothes ?'

'I should say that was the least he could do,' returned Lord St. Austell, screwing his glass into his eye and leering up into his neighbour's face. 'When husbands treat themselves to little diversions they must expect to pay for them in some shape or form ; and yours ought to pay twice as much as another man, because he has such shocking bad taste. I yield to no man in my admiration for Lady St. Austell ; but, at the same time—oh, no ! I really can't compliment Mr. Vidal on his taste. If I had the good fortune to stand in his shoes, I think I should be very well contented to do my worshipping at home.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Clare in a somewhat tremulous voice.

By way of reply, Lord St. Austell pointed with his stick to the marquee, where her ladyship could be seen, reclining in an arm-chair and talking with much apparent animation to someone whose body was concealed by the side of the tent, but whose legs and feet were visible. 'Your husband's legs,' Lord St. Austell observed explanatorily. 'My dear Mrs. Vidal, we are both of us very badly used. Suppose we try to console each other ?'

It was then that Clare distinguished herself in an unusual manner. 'Thank you,' said she, getting up ; 'but I should like you to believe that my taste is not quite so bad as my husband's.'

She turned away without deigning to watch the effect of this tremendous retort, and, joining Georgina, suggested that it was time to go away. 'Perhaps you will kindly look for

Adrian, Mr. De Wynt,' she said, not caring to show that she knew where her husband was.

It was with a heavy heart that Clare seated herself in the carriage which was to take her back to London. Things were going badly with her, she thought, and there was little ground for hope that they would ever go better. That Adrian no longer loved her in the old way was plain enough ; otherwise he would hardly have made himself so conspicuous with Lady St. Austell as to attract the notice even of Lady St. Austell's husband. Very likely he saw no great harm in flirtation ; Clare's small experience of the ways of modern society led her to believe that he was only acting as most other people acted. 'Yet,' she thought, with some bitterness, 'he might have spared me to-day. He knew that I only went to Richmond to please him ; he knew that the whole thing was hateful to me ; and, at least, he need not have devoted himself to that odious woman before my very eyes.'

Of one thing, however, she was quite determined : she would not interfere with him again. She had made her protest, and had made it vainly ; it would be useless as well as undignified to repeat it. Nor would she vex him any more by seeming annoyed at his behaviour. Neither by word nor look would she betray the pain that he was inflicting upon her. What would be the good ?

She chewed the cud of these reflections and formed the above heroic resolution, sitting, grave and silent, in the carriage, while Adrian and Georgina chatted about the party which they had just left ; and so successful was she in carrying out her intention that both her companions saw clearly that she was displeased, while one of them understood perfectly well the cause of her displeasure.

Adrian sighed impatiently once or twice. He was ready to make allowances for Clare (for what is the use of adopting the study of character as a profession if one does not learn from it to be lenient to the failings of others ?), but it seemed to him that if he yielded to every fancy of hers, his life would very soon cease to be worth having. What could be more absurd than that she should be angry with him because he had talked for a quarter of an hour to his hostess at a garden party ? While they had been taking leave of Lady St. Austell, he had noticed Clare's freezing demeanour and Lord St. Austell's sardonic grin, and had felt that he was being made ridiculous. He fully expected to be called to account

for his conduct as soon as he reached home, and to be called to account for sins which one has not committed is only less disagreeable than being called to account for those which one has. When his anticipations in this respect were falsified, he was thankful, and asked no questions, as perhaps Clare secretly hoped that he might do. He said to himself that he detested scenes, and wouldn't provoke one. Possibly, it might have been better to have a scene and a reconciliation than to allow his wife to hold him at arm's length ; but he doubted whether any reconciliation could be effected at this time without concessions which he was not prepared to offer ; so, although her coldness made him unhappy, he did not attempt to break it down, but only threw himself with redoubled energy into the work and play with which every hour of his day was easily filled.

Estrangements usually begin when quarrels end, since quarrels are such unpleasant things that few care to pick them with those whom they do not love ; but Vidal and his wife became estranged now less from indifference than from a certain lack of moral courage on both sides. If one of them was more to blame than the other, it was probably Clare, who ought to have trusted her husband until she had clear proof that he was undeserving of trust. She was also by far the more miserable of the two, having little to do but to brood over her troubles, whereas Adrian was busy from morning to night. The latter had been in the habit, ever since he had reached years of discretion, of seeking sympathy and counsel from Heriot, and he would not have departed from this custom in his present strait, had he not been deterred by a presentiment that Heriot would declare him to be in the wrong. Now, there is no sort of comfort to be got out of the advice of those who won't take your side ; and Vidal knew this so well that he gave Brook Street a wide berth, thereby making it quite plain to his friend that something was wrong.

CHAPTER XX

ESTRANGEMENT

HERIOT's circumstances and domestic arrangements so far differed from those of most bachelors that he enjoyed the privilege of asking ladies to dinner, and availed himself of it pretty freely during the season. When he invited our friends in Alexandra Gardens to honour him so far one evening, they had no excuse for sending him a refusal, although one of them would have been glad to escape the lecture which he feared was in store for him. Clare and Miss Vidal, who had not yet seen the interior of Heriot's abode, felt the curiosity natural to their sex to inspect a house which owned no mistress—a house, too, which was reported to contain artistic treasures of every description.

Their host's drawing-room proved to be very much what they had anticipated : that is to say that it was filled with beautiful and valuable objects, and that the absence of feminine superintendence was very perceptible in it. A man may hope to fit up a library or a smoking-room with fair success ; but to make a drawing-room look inhabited is a little beyond us. Heriot had not attempted this feat. With the exception of a few Oriental rugs, he had added nothing to the furniture which he had inherited, and which belonged to the period of gilding and mirrors. The pictures, the bronzes, the enamels, and the china which he had collected in the course of his travels had been sent home to Brook Street and unpacked by his housekeeper, who had arranged them without interference on the part of their owner. The result would have grieved the soul of an æsthetic dilettante ; but Heriot had something to say in justification of it.

' You see,' he explained to the two ladies, who were busily examining his pretty things, ' I feel that everybody who enters this room will do me the justice to perceive that I am not responsible for it ; whereas, if I tried to lessen its ugliness, I should probably fall into blunders which you couldn't forgive. Lady St. Austell was here the other day, and she said, " Your drawing-room is like yourself—frankly hideous, you know, at the first glance, but full of unexpected beauties, if you take the trouble to look for them." I think that was a very pretty

compliment. One doesn't make one's face ; but one may flatter one's self that the unexpected beauties are of one's own creating.'

Clare thought to herself that Lady St. Austell's own face merited precisely the opposite description ; the beauty of it being apparent to careless observers, while its unexpected uglinesses became visible upon a closer scrutiny. But she prudently refrained from saying this aloud, and Georgina laughed and remarked : 'I shall break into your house some time when you are away, Mr. Heriot, and lay hands upon various trifles which you will never miss.'

'Do,' answered Heriot ; 'or lay hands upon them now, which will be still better. Lady St. Austell did. She never comes here without carrying away some memento of her visits. She says it will save me the trouble of mentioning her in my will.'

And it was a woman who could make such speeches as that, Clare thought, whom men found fascinating ! Then De Wynt came in, rubbing his hands, and the small party was complete.

'I am sorry that we are a lady short,' Heriot said. 'Lady St. Austell, who had promised to join us, sent about an hour ago to say that she couldn't get off another engagement.'

It is probable that the absence of this fifth guest was not deeply deplored by the other four. Adrian inwardly returned thanks to Heaven for his deliverance from danger, and remarked aloud : 'We shall be ever so much jollier without outsiders.'

Yet, somehow, the evening was not a very jolly one. De Wynt may have enjoyed it, and so, perhaps, did Georgina ; but the remaining three certainly did not. Heriot could not help noticing that something was amiss between Adrian and Clare, nor could they help being aware that he noticed this ; so that their joint and several efforts to behave as though all were well failed lamentably. The presence of De Wynt was a comfort to Adrian, since nothing of a private nature could be said before him during the twenty minutes that the three men spent in the dining room after dinner ; but he was not to escape the interview with his friend which he dreaded. For when the hour of release came, and when he had put the ladies into their carriage, muttering something about going down to the club to smoke a cigar, Heriot interposed with, 'Stay and smoke your cigar with me, Adrian ; I haven't seen

anything of you yet.' To which he could only reply, 'All right, old man,' with such show of alacrity as was at his command.

'I hope it is not too late to offer my congratulations,' Heriot said after he had led the way into the comfortable library, of which he made a good deal more use than of his drawing-room. 'You have become a famous man since you were last in this house.'

'Hardly that,' answered Vidal laughing.

'Oh, you are famous—don't affect modesty with an old friend. And I am told that you write the review of fiction in that queer new venture of Pilkington's—if it is his venture. Probably it is somebody else's venture, though?'

'Oh, of course. I don't know who the principal proprietors are—Egerton, I believe, for one—but we are all of us interested in it to a small extent. What do you think of its chances?'

'As a speculation, do you mean? I am no judge of such matters; but I should think it ought to pay, if Pilkington can be induced to stick to it. I read the literary article in the last number and thought I recognised your touch. You were quite right to join the staff of the *Anglo-Saxon*. It is a brilliant one just now, and, even if it doesn't hold together long, you will be all the better for having been connected with it.'

'Do you think it won't hold together?' asked Vidal, a little anxiously.

'I know nothing about it, except that brilliant staffs have a way of splitting up after a certain time. Perhaps this one will be the exception that proves the rule. At any rate, you are not dependent upon Pilkington and his experiments. Your business is the writing of novels, and I am very glad to think that you are making a much better business of it than seemed likely this time last year.'

Vidal laughed. 'Oh, yes; the money is tumbling in. It tumbles out again, though, at a deuce of a pace. I can assure you, Heriot, that it costs a great deal more than a bachelor might suppose to maintain an establishment in a humble way on the extreme outskirts of civilised London. I feel that I ought to be laying by for a rainy day; but I haven't been able to manage it so far.'

'Let us hope that there will be no rainy days for a long time to come,' said Heriot cheerfully. 'After such a start as you have made your earnings ought to increase henceforth

rather than diminish ; and if there is such a thing as luck, I should say that you may safely count yourself a lucky man. Up to the present, at all events, you have got everything that you have wished for. You ought to be about the happiest fellow in London.'

'Well, perhaps,' answeid Vidal, who somehow rather resented this imputation. 'The things that one has wished for don't always turn out to be all that one's fancy painted them, though.'

'Do you mean to say that greatness is beginning to pall upon you already ? This is the result of too many dinners and too much flattery. Never mind, Adrian ; whenever you find your palate cloyed by an over-dose of compliments, come to me and I will administer correctives. I can pick plenty of holes in "Two Lovers," let me tell you.'

Such is the perversity of human nature that Adrian no sooner noticed a disposition on his friend's part to shirk the delicate subject that we know of, than he himself began to wish to introduce it. It was not natural to him to keep his distresses to himself ; moreover, he had some hope that Heriot had abstained from condemning him out of sheer inability to do so. So he said, 'I don't mean that. I can swallow a fair quantity of compliments without feeling sick, and I don't get any more than I can manage. But sometimes I doubt whether it was wise to take up our abode in London. I think, perhaps, we should have been happier down in Cornwall, after all. That is, I think my wife would have been happier.'

'People who have been born and bred in the country naturally long for fresh air after they have been several months in a large town,' remarked Heriot.

'Yes ; but that isn't all. The fact of the matter is that Clare hates society and I like it. Well, of course, if one were living on a Cornish moor, one would adapt one's self to circumstances, and there would be an end of it ; but I can't live like a hermit in London. I don't think it ought to be expected of me that I should.'

Heriot said nothing at all, which was rather provoking, and it was in a somewhat more aggrieved tone that Adrian went on : 'I know you understand how things are. It isn't pleasant to be received with black looks after one has talked for ten minutes to a woman who is not even young or pretty ; it isn't pleasant to be suspected and distrusted. I make every allowance for difference of temperament and all that ; still, it

isn't pleasant. And it seems to me that I should be quite wrong to give in for the sake of a quiet life. You, at all events, will believe that I would gladly give up many of my own pleasures to please Clare. I haven't changed towards her, though in some ways she has changed a little towards me. But the truth is that she wants what it is impossible that she should have—at any rate, so long as we live in London. She really is not reasonable. Of course I wouldn't say this to anyone but you.'

'Do you know,' observed Heriot quietly, 'I think you would do more wisely not to say it even to me.'

'Very well,' answered Adrian, a good deal affronted; 'I won't do it again, then. I thought perhaps you might be able to help me out a little, and you used to be willing enough to do that when you were asked; but no doubt you are quite right to snub me. It is bad form to talk about one's wife.'

'It won't do, Adrian,' returned Heriot, laughing good-humouredly. 'I decline to be inveigled into the absurd position of a mediator between two people who must understand each other better than I can understand either of them. Your quarrel—if it can be called a quarrel—seems to me perfectly ridiculous. I suppose the quarrels of lovers always do seem so to outsiders, and it would be easy enough to give you excellent advice, if one did not know that it would be superfluous. You and Clare can make friends again whenever you choose to do so, and I imagine that you will choose before you are much older. Anyhow, I wish you both to remain friends with me, and therefore I shall not say anything to either of you that I don't want repeated to the other.'

This cavalier way of dismissing the subject did not impose upon Adrian, who was too familiar with Heriot's face and voice to be deceived as to the anxiety which it was intended to conceal. But he did not insist upon plainer speaking, and only remarked, after keeping silence for a short time, 'I'm glad you don't blame me, at any rate.'

'Oh, but I never said that,' returned Heriot. 'If you want to know what I think of you, I haven't the slightest objection to telling you that I consider you are an ass. You ought to know better than to require a woman to be reasonable, and you certainly must know, that whatever other women may be or do, your wife doesn't carry unreasonableness to the pitch of wishing you to renounce all society.'

This being exactly what Adrian believed that Clare did

wish, the question of whether he was more or less of an ass than Heriot gave him credit for being seemed to remain open ; but he did not care to bring the point forward ; nor did he think it worth while to mention, as he had intended doing for a moment, the alarm that he had been caused by Susan Bowman's reappearance. He went away soon afterwards, admitting to himself that Heriot had probably been right in refusing to meddle between husband and wife, yet feeling a little sore that he had been denied the sympathy which his friend had never before failed to extend to him.

Sympathy was, in fact, to Adrian Vidal very much what an ancient coin was to his father-in-law. He could make shift to do without it at a pinch ; but he could not deny himself the solace of it, if it was to be had anywhere within reach ; and when the customary sources failed him, he was fain to seek what he required in Grosvenor Square. With Lady St. Austell's habits, opinions, and general conception of life he had no more sympathy than she had with his ; but there were certain minor points as to which they were in complete agreement ; and, besides, it was pleasant to be smiled upon and made much of.

'So you are going down to Polruth again,' she said to him one afternoon. She was sipping a cup of tea and was equipped for the Park ; for the hour was approaching when she, like most other ladies, felt it incumbent upon her to take part in that daily parade which they would find so intolerable if it were made compulsory. Beyond the open window behind her were banks of flowers ; the lowered sunblinds made the light subdued ; and in the coolness and fragrance of the room, in the ceaseless roll of the carriages outside, even in the aspect of the well-dressed, well-preserved woman who sat opposite him, the jewels on her plump white hands flashing as she raised her tea-cup Adrian found something that at the same time soothed and excited his senses. In truth, the atmosphere of London was as delightful to him as the atmosphere of the country is to some other people.

'So you are going down to Polruth again,' she repeated—'dear old sleepy Polruth ! How will you like that ?'

'I liked it very well last year,' Adrian answered.

'Ah, last year was—last year. I can understand that you enjoyed yourself very much then ; but one ought never to go back to places where one has enjoyed one's self ; and to go back with the partner of one's former joys—after having

actually married her too !' Lady St. Austell shook her head gravely. 'I should think it would be dreadfully depressing,' she remarked presently.

Adrian had reasons for thinking that it very possibly might be ; but he did not feel inclined to state them, or to claim Lady St. Austell's sympathy with regard to this particular matter. 'Shall you be in Cornwall in the course of the summer ?' he asked ; and, feeling that her presence in the vicinity of Polruth would be far from an unqualified boon, he was rather glad to hear her reply, 'Not this year, I believe. We are to go to Scotland rather earlier than usual, and after that we shall have to be in Hertfordshire until the hunting begins. That is the worst of having so many houses. One is obliged to live in them more or less, and the consequence is that one really lives nowhere, and can never lay one's hand upon anything that one wants.'

'I don't think I should object to eighty thousand a year, all the same,' remarked Vidal. 'Or is it a hundred thousand ?'

'I don't know what it is,' answered Lady St. Austell. 'Of course one would a great deal rather be rich than poor ; but the provoking thing about money is that it seems as if it ought to give you everything, and yet, after a certain point, it only gives you the same things as your neighbours have, but on a rather larger scale. I can quite enter into the feelings of Matthew Arnold's sick king in Bokhara, who had wealth and fame, and all the rest of it, but could not even save a beggar from being stoned to death. What is the use of being such a magnificent person if one can't do what one wants or have what one wants ?'

'What is the special thing that you want ?' Vidal inquired.

Lady St. Austell sighed plaintively. 'Ah, so many things !—and all of them especial things, too ! But it's no use thinking about them. One thing I want, which ought not to be impossible. I want you to come and stay with us in Scotland. Are you fond of shooting ? If you are, you will be able to amuse yourself all day ; and then perhaps you will take pity upon me, and amuse me a little in the evening.'

'Thanks ; it's very kind of you,' began Vidal hesitatingly.

'Now, I know what you are going to say,' interrupted Lady St. Austell ; 'your wife won't let you leave her. Well, she can come too, if she likes. I am sure I shall be delighted to see her. So will Lord St. Austell,' she added, with a little titter, of which the significance escaped her hearer.

' You are extremely kind,' said Adrian again.

' And you are more than extremely foolish,' retorted Lady St. Austell, who was not fond of being thwarted. ' Why do you allow yourself to be so cruelly henpecked ?'

' It isn't exactly that,' Adrian said.

' Oh, but I assure you it is exactly that, and you won't find it a bit the less inconvenient for being called by another name. Really, I have no patience with women like Mrs. Vidal ! I don't say it to annoy you, you know ; but it is a fact that I have taken some trouble to be polite to her, and have had nothing but rudeness in return. As far as I am concerned, she is perfectly welcome to be rude ; only I do most sincerely pity you. Without vanity, I may say for myself that I am rather more good-natured than most people ; and if she goes on like this she will very soon deprive you of all your friends. I should like to have her here for five minutes to tell her what I think of her.'

Adrian opened his mouth ; but whether he was going to undertake his wife's defence or to apologise for her ingratitude will never be known, for he had not yet got out a word when the door was thrown open and ' Mrs. and Miss Vidal ' were announced.

It was certainly a piece of rather bad luck that Clare should have selected this afternoon of all others for paying the call which she owed after Lady St. Austell's garden party, and it was also bad luck that Georgina, who wanted to see the inside of the house, should have persuaded her to come in, instead of leaving cards at the door. The moment of her entrance was an awkward one for everybody. Even Lady St. Austell was a little thrown off her balance by this speedy fulfilment of the wish that she had just uttered, and felt no inclination to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded her for speaking home truths ; whilst Adrian, who had jumped up from his chair, stood smiling foolishly, and looking a great deal more conscious of having been caught than so seasoned a man of the world had any business to do.

Clare, as a general thing, had far less self-command than either of the other two ; but she now remained perfectly composed, surprising her husband, and compelling the respect of a lady who respected but few things. She stayed for about ten minutes, making conversation, somewhat stiffly, but without apparent effort, and exchanging cold civilities with Lady St. Austell, who had of course shaken off her momentary embar-

rassment, but who probably judged the occasion inopportune for renewing that invitation to Scotland which Adrian had already declined on his wife's behalf. To him Clare did not address a word until she rose to go, when she turned to him and asked, 'Are you coming with us?' The question admitted of but one reply; so Adrian presently found himself descending the staircase behind his wife and sister, looking—and knowing that he looked—extremely like a schoolboy who has been pounced upon by his master when out of bounds, and is being led back for punishment.

He was not in an observant frame of mind; otherwise he might possibly have noticed a red baize door, giving access to the back stairs, which was cautiously opened an inch or two as he passed. Behind that door might have been seen the exultant countenance of Miss Susan Bowman, who was rubbing her hands softly, and who laughed aloud when the three visitors had disappeared. This was indeed a treat! Susan required nobody to tell her that the meeting between Mr. Vidal and his wife had been unpremeditated on both sides, and, having noticed the expression of their respective countenances as they passed her post of observation, she had little difficulty in picturing to herself the sort of interview which would be likely to take place between them on their return home.

'Oh, my dear friend and benefactor,' she murmured, 'what an evening you are going to have! I shouldn't wonder if you had been telling a few little innocent lies of late about the number of times you have been to see her ladyship, and I shouldn't wonder if you had to confess the lot of them. Tears?—bless you, yes! you'll get plenty of *them*: and you're not partial to tears, you know. You'll have to make some promises, too, and then you'll break them, and then you'll be found out again; and so it will go on till you wish you were dead. That wife of yours has got a nice, soft, pretty face of her own; but there was a look upon it just now which makes me suspect that she can scratch as well as purr—and she'll let you find it out to-night, unless I'm very much mistaken.'

But Susan was mistaken, as it happened, and although Mrs. Vidal did indeed find it necessary to request a private interview with her husband that evening, Lady St. Austell's name was not mentioned in the course of it, and it was she, not he, who found it a painful one.

When Clare followed Adrian into his study, after the rest of the household had retired to bed, and began: 'Adrian, I

have something to speak to you about,' he groaned in spirit, fearing the worst ; and nothing could have exceeded his relief when it turned out that all she had to say was that she was at the end of her resources, and that the household expenditure could no longer by any possibility be kept within the limits assigned to it some months before. He did not in the least realise what it cost her to make this avowal ; he was far from imagining that, in order to avoid making it sooner, she had deprived herself of every personal luxury that could be dispensed with, and that to her somewhat disordered fancy it appeared as though by admitting her failure to accomplish her duty as a housewife, she were in some sort condoning the offences which he, on his side, had committed against her.

'Why didn't you tell me this before ?' he asked, unlocking the drawer of his writing-table, and taking out all the loose cash that he had by him. 'Of course, an extra person being in the house must make a difference, and one can't dine one's friends for nothing. We'll have a supplementary vote now and increase the estimates for the future. What shall we put it at ? Half as much again ? All right ; and if that isn't enough, you must let me know. I can always make up a deficit by a little extra work.'

This was certainly a liberal way of doing things, for Adrian's coffers were by no means overflowing, and he thought that his wife would at least reward him with a few words of thanks. But she did nothing of the kind. She only gathered up the money, remarking, 'I am sorry to have been such a bad manager,' and moved towards the door.

Adrian let her go. It seemed to him that she made an almost imperceptible halt upon the threshold, as if she thought he might be going to call her back, and, indeed, he was more than half inclined to do so. But he resisted the weakness. What would be the good, he thought, of entering upon explanations which would certainly not be held satisfactory, and listening to reproaches of which he could not admit the justice ? Time and change of scene would do their work, he hoped ; and it was better to trust to such old-established remedies than to the doubtful one of a scene, followed by a possible treaty of peace.

CHAPTER XXI

A CRUEL CALUMNY

HERIOT was a poor sleeper at the best of times ; and when anything occurred to disturb or perplex him after ten o'clock in the evening, his chances of rest before daybreak were small indeed. The brief conversation which he had held with Adrian upon the subject of the latter's domestic troubles had worried him a good deal more than he had chosen to show ; and when he had read a book in bed until his head ached, without inducing the faintest sensation of drowsiness, he blew out his candle, and resigned himself to the fact that he was going to have a night of it. This being by no means his first experience of the kind, he did not count up to ten thousand, or try to see an endless flock of sheep leaping over a stile, or adopt any other of the futile remedies by means of which some people, similarly circumstanced, are wont to goad themselves to the verge of insanity, but lay patiently on the flat of his back, like a sensible man, and reflected.

And this, among other things, was what he said to himself : ‘ It’s rather a hard case when a man can do nothing for his two best friends, except hold his tongue. Here are these silly people drifting apart, thinking evil of one another, and doing all they know to build up a wall between themselves which may gradually reach such a height that they will never see each other again—and all about nothing ! Half a dozen words would set the whole stupid misunderstanding straight ; only it isn’t by me that they can be spoken. I was right to shut Adrian up ; he has a strong case, and it wouldn’t do to argue it with him. As for Clare, she has next to no case at all ; so that argument with her would be even more hopeless. The best thing that could happen to them would be to have a downright quarrel ; but I’m afraid it won’t come to that, and if I interfere they will both quarrel with me, as sure as this is a world of fools. Evidently, there’s nothing for it but to stand on the brink and watch them sinking or swimming, as the case may be.’

But such a philosophical course of action was hardly within the compass of one whose heart was softer than his head, and Heriot felt that there was a hope—a rather forlorn one,

it was true, still a hope—that he might to some extent benefit, by means of speech, those whom he desired to serve. No one knew better than he did that the real source of their trouble lay in total dissimilarity of character, and that if it had not appeared in this direction, it would assuredly have done so, sooner or later, in that ; but just as there are certain latent maladies which can only be arrested when they manifest themselves in a specific form, so it seemed possible that something might be done for this estranged couple by removing what was at all events the ostensible cause of their disagreement. Of course, it was not certain that such a removal could be effected ; but Lady St. Austell, like many other selfish people, was extremely good-natured, and if it were represented to her that she was bringing a vast amount of unhappiness upon others, with very little prospect of counterbalancing advantage to herself, she would be quite as likely as not to give Adrian his *congé*, and appoint some more suitable young man to take his place.

So Heriot thought he would make the attempt. An attack of illness, which was the penalty that he invariably paid for fidgeting himself overmuch about any matter, prevented him from giving effect to his resolution for some days ; but, as soon as he was able to go out again, he betook himself to Grosvenor Square, and arrived there, as it chanced, just after Adrian and Clare had escaped from the comfortless visit of ceremony described in the last chapter. Lady St. Austell's carriage was at the door ; but, after Heriot had been kept waiting a few minutes, he was told that she would receive him, and she interrupted his apologies by declaring that she would much rather talk to him than go out for a drive.

'I am only thankful that you didn't come in five minutes ago,' she said. 'If you had, I should certainly have burst out laughing, and then I don't know what would have happened. I do wish people wouldn't have such foolish wives !'

'Whose husband have you been qualifying to match his wife in that respect ?' asked Heriot.

'Oh, nobody's. If that poor Mrs. Vidal only knew what a perfectly harmless, and indeed improving thing platonic affection is, I am sure she would be a far happier woman.'

'Not a doubt of it ; but we must have patience with the dulness of humanity and forgive those who are not yet educated up to our standard. So it is Mrs. Vidal who has been behaving foolishly ?'

'I can't quite say that. No ; she behaved wonderfully well, considering. She was very freezing ; but she was not rude. I imagine, though, that she doesn't allow her husband even to pay calls without her, for I never saw any one look so utterly dumbfounded as he did when she was announced. Oddly enough, we had just been talking about her, and as I was telling him in a friendly way how idiotic it was of him to let himself be ridden over roughshod by her, in she walked, accompanied by that grenadier of a woman who, I am told, scampers about the Cannibal Islands without any clothes on during the greater part of the year.'

'Really, I think there must have been a trifling exaggeration about that report,' said Heriot.

'Perhaps so ; it doesn't much signify. She was quite clothed to-day, and I presume she was in her right mind ; though why she should have planted herself before me, with her hands on her knees, and stared at me as if I were some new kind of savage, I don't know.'

'Open-mouthed admiration,' said Heriot. 'It couldn't have been anything else, you know.'

'Well, whatever it was, it was rather embarrassing. And I think these good people might understand that I am not so desperately eager to cultivate them, after all. Mr. Vidal is all very well, and I am always delighted to see him ; but I don't know whether I was quite right in trying to take up his wife. I only did it out of pure benevolence, and I certainly never expected her to put on airs with me. It *is* just a little bit impertinent. Don't you think so yourself ?'

'Oh, I shouldn't submit to it for a single moment,' answered Heriot ; 'I can't think why you do. These Vidals evidently don't know their proper place, and ought to be put back into it without delay. The next time he comes, you had better give him to understand as much, and then he won't come any more.'

Lady St. Austell sniffed meditatively at her gold-mounted bottle of smelling-salts.

'H-m-m ! But you see, I should miss him, poor fellow ! He really is very nice.'

'You don't say so ! Has he actually succeeded in touching your heart, in spite of the inferiority of rank to which you are so alive ?'

'Oh, that was you ; *I* never said anything about their inferiority. No ; I don't know that he has exactly touched

my heart, as you call it, yet ; but I fancy that if we saw more of each other we might perhaps arrive at—an understanding. But it is never any use to talk about things of this kind with you, because you have no more feeling than a stock or a stone.'

' You will allow that I am capable of friendship, however,' Heriot began.

But he was prevented from explaining what bearing this alleged capacity of his had upon the matter under discussion by the entrance of no less a person than Lord St. Austell himself. That Lord St. Austell should enter his wife's drawing-room before dinner was quite an event. He very seldom acted in that way without some special reason, and the moment that Lady St. Austell, who stood considerably in awe of him, saw the grin upon his features, she felt sure that he had come to torment her—as indeed he had.

' I trust I am not indiscreet,' said he, peering into the semi-darkness which had now fallen upon the room. ' Oh, it's only Mr. Heriot ; I thought, perhaps, it might be somebody else. Mr. Heriot don't count, does he ? He is something like me, out of the running. Ah, well ! we shall all three be laid on the shelf soon—very soon.'

' You don't generally behave as if you considered yourself shelved,' retorted Lady St. Austell, out of whom innuendoes of this description never failed to get a rise. ' It is a pity you didn't come in a little earlier. You would have seen that pretty Mrs. Vidal whom you admire so much.'

' Then I'm very sorry I didn't come in a little earlier,' responded his lordship. ' I admire Mrs. Vidal immensely—almost as much as you admire her husband. But then I am so careful ; I keep my admiration within bounds ; I wouldn't compromise a lady for the world. Where is you, I am afraid, really did rather compromise a lady—yourself, I mean—at Richmond the other day. Did I tell you what the Grand Duchess of Saxe-Tugendheim said about you ? She asked me whether what she had heard was true, and that you were very *emancipirt*. I wonder what she could have meant ! Perhaps Mr. Heriot, who has been so much abroad, can enlighten us. I answered her Serene Highness that I really didn't know, but that I thought, if you had ever been afflicted in that way, you must have outgrown it. At what age does a woman generally cease to be *emancipirt*, Mr. Heriot ?'

Heriot, who did not like Lord St. Austell, took no notice

of the question ; but Lady St. Austell, as her husband was very well aware, had a great dread of being looked upon coldly by high personages, and showed signs of uneasiness. ‘Some wretch must have been saying horrid things about me !’ she exclaimed. ‘I can’t think what you mean by my having compromised myself that day. I was particularly careful to do nothing of the kind.’

‘It seemed to me that you were,’ agreed her tormentor. ‘Didn’t you break down a little towards the end of the day, though ? It struck me that you became rather conspicuously invisible, and that your friend the author followed suit, all except his boots ; I saw his boots.’

‘But that was after the Grand Duchess had left.’

‘So it was ; and of course that made a difference. Still, the wretches who tell tales remained. You can’t escape the eyes of these malevolent gossips, even when you are out of sight ; and the mischief of it is that they laugh at you. One doesn’t mind being accused of wickedness, and one can stand being called *emancipist*—especially if one doesn’t know what it means. But to be sniggered at by Tom, Dick, and Harry is not pleasant. I really almost think I should throw the author over, if I were you.’

That ironical tone always alarmed Lady St. Austell. ‘Do you wish me to drop Mr. Vidal ?’ she asked quite humbly.

‘I ? Oh, dear no ! Pray don’t mind me. Nothing delights me more than to see you amused and making the most of your time ; and, as I was saying just now, we can none of us hope to remain young much longer. All I would venture to suggest to you, in your own interest, is that you should not take up with newspaper men. They’re not to be trusted. Now, here,’ continued Lord St. Austell, producing with evident relish the new number of the *Anglo-Saxon*, ‘here is a paper for which I believe your friend Mr. Vidal is partly responsible, and just see what he has the impudence to say about you.’

Lady St. Austell took the paper and read the following paragraph, which formed one of a series of items headed ‘Social Scraps :’

‘The evergreen wife of a well-known and highly-respected sporting peer was made the subject of some rather severe strictures by one of the Royal guests whom she had the honour of entertaining not long since. “*On devrait savoir vieillir,*” and other audible remarks to the like effect, cannot have been very agreeable hearing for a lady who is popularly credited

with having solved the problem of making the clock stand still,

'It isn't meant for me,' gasped poor Lady St. Austell ; it's meant for Lady Glastonbury.'

But her lord shook his head and grinned more than ever. He had come in for the express purpose of showing his wife this cruel paragraph, and the effect of it upon her was all that he had hoped it would be. 'I fear,' said he, 'that there can't be any doubt as to who is meant. Lady Glastonbury, you know, is a widow, and the reference to myself is unmistakable. "A well-known sporting peer"—I am certainly that ; and I believe I may add that I am also highly respected. You, apparently, are not. You're only "evergreen," and some uncertainty seems to be felt as to the appropriateness of even that epithet. Too bad, upon my word, the way newspapers are conducted nowadays ! I should have thought Mr. Pilkington would have been above publishing such scurrility ; but nothing is sacred to a newspaper man. You have warmed a Vidal in your bosom (figuratively speaking), and he has rewarded you after the usual fashion of those reptiles. Well, I must be going now. Don't let this distress you. *Il n'y a que la vérité qui blesse*, you know, and of course these insinuations are palpably false.'

And with that parting shot Lord St. Austell decamped gleefully.

CHAPTER XXII

PLAIN LANGUAGE

HERRIOT with difficulty resisted a desperate inclination to burst out laughing. He did not feel very merry ; but the spectacle of a woman cast down into the depths of dejection because somebody had asserted that somebody else had asserted the unquestionable fact that she was no longer young had in it that mixture of the pathetic and the ludicrous which is more apt to excite laughter than the broadest farce. Probably nothing on earth could have moved Lady St. Austell more profoundly than the publication of that horrid little anecdote. If he were to appeal to the better part of her nature—and it had a better part, though so entangled with the worse one as

to be hardly separable from it—if he were to tell her that, by toying with an idle fancy, she might quite possibly bring misery upon others in comparison with which her own present vexation was the merest childishness, she simply wouldn't understand him. She would see neither the comic nor the tragic side of the business. In her defective mental vision the great things of life were small, and the small great. It would have seemed to her as impossible that a woman should break her heart over the unfaithfulness of a husband or lover as it would to Clare Vidal that a woman should feel all light to have gone out of the world because people had discovered that her charms were on the wane. Lovers are replaced, and husbands are forgotten, Lady St. Austell might have said; but who can give us back our lost youth?

Heriot thought of all this while he listened to Lady St. Austell's eager and agonised questions. Did he believe that Mr. Vidal had really had anything to do with the insertion of that monstrous paragraph in the *Anglo-Saxon*? Did he believe that the Grand Duchess had really made the speech reported by Lord St. Austell? Could it have been the Grand Duchess who had said '*Il faut savoir vieillir?*' or could it—dreadful thought!—have been an even more distinguished personage?

Heriot answered her and pacified her to the best of his ability. He was quite sure that Adrian had had nothing to do with the paragraph complained of, nor indeed with any words printed in the *Anglo-Saxon*, save such as surmounted his own signature. 'As to what the Princes and Princesses may have said, you ought to be a better judge of that than I. They are reputed to be very good-natured, however, and I doubt whether they would make "audible remarks" about any one who was entertaining them. If you want to know what I think, I suspect that the Grand Duchess's speech was an invention of Lord St. Austell's. Whether he is also responsible for the newspaper story, I can't say.'

'He *could* not be such a malignant wretch!' cried the injured lady. But, upon further reflection, she admitted that he was malignant enough for anything, and seemed to derive a good deal of comfort from that conviction. That such horrors should have appeared in print was very sad, very painful; but it was something to be able to believe that Royal and Serene Highnesses had been as much calumniated in the matter as herself. 'I think,' said she musingly, 'that I will

write a note to Mr. Pilkington, and tell him that he will be held personally responsible for this reckless insolence. He knows that I can make things very uncomfortable for him if he offends me.'

And it may be stated here that Lady St. Austell actually did this, and that in the next number of the *Anglo-Saxon* appeared the following disclaimer:—‘We regret to find that a foolish (and, as we are assured, absolutely baseless) report of certain remarks said to have been made by a Royal personage at the house of a lady of distinction has caused serious annoyance in more quarters than one. It must be distinctly understood that the items printed under the heading of “Social Scraps” are what they purport to be, merely gossip; that is, current rumours, which may or may not be true. Personally, we dislike and deprecate the publication of such trivialities, which the public taste, or want of taste, appears, nevertheless, to demand.—ED. *Anglo-Saxon*.’

But the above extraordinary editorial utterance did not, of course, see the light until nearly four weeks after the day with which we are at present concerned, and Lady St. Austell was, for the moment, less anxious to be avenged upon the *Anglo-Saxon*, than to convince herself and her hearer that her husband, and he alone, was to blame for this anguish.

‘This,’ she said, ‘is quite of a piece with what his conduct has always been. No sooner do I become attached to any one than he makes himself so disagreeable that I am obliged to break with that person. It was very much in this way that he began to go on about poor Johnny Spencer; and I do think it is rather needlessly cruel of him, considering that I never dream of making a fuss about his flirtations, which, as you know, are a thousand times worse than mine.’

‘It’s abominable,’ answered Heriot; ‘but it can’t be helped. So, then, you will have to drop Vidal after all, you think?’

‘I would drop anybody or anything rather than be so persecuted; but perhaps I shall not be driven to it. I hope I may not; for I feel sure that the poor young man finds some consolation in my society, and, as I was saying before this sickening interruption took place, he really is very nice.’

‘I think you had much better drop him,’ said Heriot.

‘But why? You are a friend of his, and you always say that you are a friend of mine too; why should you grudge us

any few stray hours of happiness that we can manage to secure in this disappointing world ?'

'Well,' answered Heriot, 'I will tell you why. Firstly because these stray hours would give no happiness worth speaking of to you, and probably none whatever to him. Secondly, because they would certainly cause unhappiness to Mrs. Vidal, who is also a friend of mine, and who has some slight claim to be considered. I don't say that it isn't very foolish of her to be jealous of you : in my opinion it is. But the fact remains that she is inclined to be so ; and therefore I want you to make a little sacrifice for once, and spare her annoyance.'

'She ought not to be encouraged to be so selfish,' returned Lady St. Austell pouting.

Heriot was too displeased to be amused. 'Selfish !' he exclaimed ; 'and pray, what are you ? Did it ever occur to you, I wonder, that there is anything shameful or contemptible in the kind of life that you lead ? To such a woman as Mrs. Vidal, you may be sure that it would seem almost inconceivably so. To get through the time somehow, to flirt as long as flirting remains possible, to use a coronet on your note-paper, to be gaped at by inferior mortals and to tremble at the frown of a German Grand Duchess—what noble ambitions !—what an ideal existence ! I don't know whether you believe in Christianity ; most likely you think nothing about the matter ; but I suspect that, if you were driven into a corner, you would hardly have the courage to call yourself an infidel. Your cynicism is only skin-deep, like your loves, or platonic affections, or whatever you may be pleased to call them. You have never looked things deliberately in the face, as Lord St. Austell has, and said to yourself that you will eat and drink, for to-morrow you die. If you were told that you would literally have to die to-morrow, you would be frightened out of your wits—you know you would. You would send off post-haste for the parson, and see whether something couldn't be done with bell, book, and candle. Well, now let me advise you, as a friend, to do a good action or two while you can, so as to have something in hand when that day comes. And while I am being so candid, allow me to ask you one more question. Have you any lurking idea that you can get Adrian Vidal to fall in love with you ? If you have, disabuse your mind of it. He is in love with his wife ; and if he were not, he would be no more likely to become enamoured of you than

I am. Try to believe that, for it is the truth; and then, perhaps, you may find it a little more easy to set Mrs. Vidal an example of unselfishness.'

This diatribe, which was not at all in Heriot's usual style, so astonished Lady St. Austell that at first she suspected him of having suddenly gone out of his mind. Then she thought she would quarrel with him; but her indomitable good nature got the better of this impulse, and she ended by laughing a little nervously.

'After that,' said she, 'I think I had better retire to my bedroom and reflect upon my sins. I am sorry to be obliged to send you away; but it is getting rather late, and I am dining out to-night.'

Heriot had no objection to being sent away. He did not want to weaken the effect of his outburst by further speech; and, as he withdrew, he flattered himself that he had at least made some impression upon her ladyship. Had he spoken with less heat, he might have chosen his words more carefully, and thus avoided producing an impression which was hardly calculated to further the end that he had in view. A few hours later, only two assertions out of his harangue remained in Lady St. Austell's memory—namely, that in Mrs. Vidal's eyes she was shameful and contemptible, and that it was out of her power to make Mr. Vidal fall in love with her. That being so, it was scarcely surprising that the dislike which she already felt for Mrs. Vidal should have been intensified, or that she should have determined to show that Mr. Vidal could be made to fall in love with her quite as easily as other people had been.

CHAPTER XXIII

PODDLY JOKE

IT is a long lane that has no turning. The first of August came at last, as all days come—some slowly, some quickly, some bringing good things and some evil—according to the beneficent law of compensation which makes the world go round. Thus, what caused joy to Clare Vidal was matter for regret to others, and a sorrowful man was Mr. De Wynt when

the day approached on which the house in Alexandra Gardens was to be closed to him for some months to come. He dined with his friends on the last evening, and played a succession of such mournful little dirges after dinner that Clare's heart was moved with pity, and she crossed over to the piano to try and comfort him.

'So it's all over, Mrs. Vidal,' he said.

'Oh no, it isn't,' answered Clare; 'we are only going away for a short holiday, all of us. I suppose you are going too.'

'Yes; I shall have to go and stay with an uncle of mine, who says he means to leave me all his property, and who takes his equivalent out of me beforehand by making me trudge over acres of arable land with him every day. I don't call that much of a holiday, you know. And I shall be back in London again long before you are.'

'We shall be back in the beginning of the winter,' said Clare. 'And perhaps,' she added, 'we may induce Georgina to come and stay with us again then.'

'Yes, if she hasn't started for Greenland's icy mountains or Afric's coral strand by that time,' observed De Wynt ruefully.

'You must prevent her from doing that,' said Clare.

'Oh, I can't, you know. What little influence I have with Miss Vidal is due simply to my careful self-effacement. If I were to assert myself, she would knock me down and jump upon me at once, so to speak.'

'If you allow yourself to be jumped upon, jumped upon you will be,' observed Clare. 'You ought not to allow it. Shall I let you into a secret? If you want to increase your influence with Georgina, you had better treat her with a little less deference. Don't you know that men are born to command and women to obey?'

The little man put his head on one side and considered this. 'Well,' he said at length, 'I shouldn't wonder if you were right. But, seriously, Miss Vidal is so much my superior that I can't quite imagine myself ordering her about.'

'Mr. De Wynt,' said Georgina, coming up at this moment, 'you are to be at the Great Western terminus at nine o'clock to-morrow m^rning, please, to say good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Vidal; and after that, you can drive with me to the Brighton station and take my ticket for me.'

This, at all events, was an order to which no objection

could be made, and it struck Clare as a hopeful sign that Georgina, who was so very well able to take care of herself, should think it necessary to secure an escort from Paddington to Victoria.

But in truth her thoughts were, at this time, not quite so much at the service of her neighbours as usual, and it must be owned that as soon as she found herself seated in the railway carriage, opposite Adrian, and speeding westward as fast as an express train could carry her, she straightway forgot those whom she was leaving. Indeed, she asked for nothing better than to forget. To forget London, and the butcher, and the baker, and the terrible cook—yes ; and to forget other troubles than these, if only that were feasible. Her heart grew lighter with every league that was placed between her and the hated metropolis. The panacea which had suggested itself to Adrian suggested itself also to her, and it seemed to her that when once they were at Cardrew again, all would be well. Almost before she had realised that they were really off at last, they had left Swindon behind them and were tearing away again towards Bath and Bristol. Then, as the day wore on, came Exeter ; then, after some slackening of speed, Plymouth, where speed ceased altogether, and the familiar jog-trot of the dear old Cornwall railway began.

Meanwhile, Adrian, who had been reading the papers a little and sleeping a good deal, had been furtively watching his wife's face in the intervals of slumber, and had in some measure read her thoughts. He, too, longed to forgive and forget ; he, too, was not sorry to have bidden farewell to London for a season, and cherished hopes of happier days to come. So that here were two people eager to kiss and be friends, and the only question was which of them should speak the first word.

That neither of them did speak it was owing to the melancholy circumstance that neither of them felt disposed towards unconditional surrender. Each firmly believed the other to be in the wrong ; and, though ready to forgive, could not conscientiously ask to be forgiven. And as there was no open quarrel between them, there could be no sudden peace-making ; nor, as it turned out, any gradual one either.

The first few days at Cardrew were entirely delightful ones for Clare. The clamorous welcome of the boys, her mother's excited garrulity, Mr. Irvine's placid contentment, and all the old home sights and sounds from which she had been separated

for so long, were sufficient to satisfy her soul for that length of time. But then she began to feel the difference that a year had made in her life. There were no more long walks with Adrian now—neither he nor she would have dreamt of proposing such a thing ; instead of devising stratagems to escape the company of her brothers, she found herself striving to accomplish just the contrary result ; there was a difficulty in getting through the hours which was quite new to her, and gradually her spirits sank to almost as low a level as they had reached in London. Indeed, a sense of disappointment, of something being wanting, extended to the whole party—even to Mrs. Irvine, who said she was afraid she must be growing old.

‘ Not that I haven’t plenty of activity left in me yet ; but I don’t enjoy hurrying about as I used, and I suppose we must look upon that as a symptom. What will happen to Polruth when I die is more than I can imagine ! One is bound to believe that the world will manage to get on somehow after one’s death, just as it did before one was born ; but I can’t help thinking that for a time everything will be at sixes and sevens. There are those wicked Pentire lads, for instance, who will persist in going about robbing hen-roosts. They would have been in a reformatory long ago if it hadn’t been for me ; and though you may say that that would have been a good thing for the community, it wouldn’t have been at all a good thing for their poor mother. And that is only one case out of many. Without vanity, I do think I shall be missed.’

Such sad forebodings were not of a nature to dispel the gloom which had fallen upon the household, and the arrival of Heriot did not greatly improve matters. Mrs. Irvine confided to him that she felt uneasy about her daughter, and asked him whether he did not think her looking ill and miserable ; but he only replied that, though Clare did indeed seem to be a little out of sorts, it was best to take no notice of these vague maladies, for which rest and fresh air were the best cures. To him there was nothing vague in the nature of Clare’s malady ; but it was certainly one which notice was more likely to increase than to diminish, and he accordingly endeavoured to remain unconscious of it ; in which effort, as a matter of course, he failed as signally as Clare and Adrian did in their attempts to behave as though they were upon friendly terms.

In many ways doth the full heart reveal
The presence of the love it would conceal;
But in far more th' estrang'd heart lets know
The absence of the love which yet it fain would show.

Mrs. Irvine, who was not a particularly keen observer, and had, besides, a happy faculty of ignoring what she did not wish to see, perceived nothing more than that her daughter was not in the best of health ; but Heriot, as the young people knew, was less easily hoodwinked : hence the intercourse of these three, which had formerly been so pleasant, became a trifle strained and painful. However, they kept up appearances, avoided perilous allusions to bygone days, went on excursions together, which all of them found rather long, and made frequent use of the boat, now commanded by Charley, in the absence of the more experienced Bob.

That strange perversity which leads us all to pride ourselves upon our proficiency in what we are most ignorant of caused Charley to fancy that he knew something about sailing, even as it had once deluded his brother into taking charge of a dog-cart freighted with valuable lives ; and his eagerness to push a cruise somewhat beyond the well-known limits of Polruth Bay was not to be withstood by persons who were beginning to persuade themselves that they really didn't much care whether they were drowned or not. So one day Charley got out the Ordnance map and pointed out upon it a diminutive creek, which, he said, could be easily reached in two hours with a fair wind, and which is known by the amazing name of Poddly Joke. Searchers after the picturesque in North Cornwall will be aware that the term Joke—or Choke, as some prefer to write it—is not of uncommon occurrence in those parts, as applied to an inlet of the sea (the derivation of Poddly awaits an interpreter); and admirers of Mr. Brett's pictures will be familiar with the colouring which renders such places remarkable. Poddly Joke, seen at low water on a fine day, has an attraction for the artistic eye—beyond that bestowed upon it by white sands, dark blue sea, and a background of green hills—in the curious bloom which overspreads its rocks, and which, on closer inspection, is discovered to be caused by an incrustation of myriads of mussels ; and as this phenomenon (at least so far as Charley Irvine and the present humble chronicler are aware) is peculiar to the Cornish coast, it seemed only right that a stranger like Mr. Vidal should be made acquainted with it.

Adrian offered no objection to Charley's proposal; but perhaps neither he nor his wife would have consented so readily, could they have foreseen that at the last moment Heriot would be prevented by a slight attack of illness from accompanying them. Between four people conversation can always be kept up; but when there are only three in a boat, and when the attention of one of them is concentrated wholly upon navigation, the remaining two may under certain circumstances find the task of entertaining one another a little difficult. Yet there are conditions which seem to make silence natural; and as Clare and Adrian were wafted out of Polruth harbour by a light north-easterly breeze, they felt that there was nothing oppressive in the drowsy taciturnity which fell upon them. The weather, Charley averred, was precisely what it ought to be. The glass, it was true, had gone back a little during the night, and away to the south-westward the haze had a somewhat dark appearance, as though clouds might be massing up behind it; but the change, if there was going to be one, would certainly not come for another two tides; and the wind, supposing that it held, would serve them almost as well for returning as for going.

In the meantime it was fortunate that all three occupants of the boat happened to be good sailors, for there was a long swell running, which increased after they had rounded Polruth Head, and which ended by giving Adrian matter for reflection. 'How are you going to land us, Charley?' he asked after a time.

'Oh, we shall run the boat up on the beach somewhere,' answered Charley airily.

'But, my good fellow, you can't beach a boat just when and where you please; and with this swell, you might easily run her into a surf that would convert her into matchwood in precious quick time. Which way does the place with the sweet-sounding name face?'

'How on earth should I know? I've only been there once in my life, and it didn't occur to me to take its bearings at the time. West by south, or something near that, I should say.'

'And the sea is at present running from the south-west, as perhaps you haven't noticed. I don't pretend to your nautical knowledge, but that looks to me very much as if the wind meant backing before long.'

'Oh, well, if we can't land, we can't,' answered Charley.

'I dare say you'll be able to get a very good idea of the place without going on shore ; and, as for the wind backing, that 'll be all the better for us. We shall only have to run home before it.'

'Yes—if we don't get too much of it. Do you know, Charley, I think we might as well give this up for to-day. The sea is rising every minute, and there's a look about the sky that I don't altogether like.'

'Why, what do you think is going to happen ?' asked the other contemptuously.

'I think it's going to blow, that's all.'

'And if it does ? Little do you know the sea-going qualities of the "Midget" ! I'd undertake to sail her from Polruth to St. Ives in half a gale of wind.'

'I have no doubt you would undertake a great many insane things with a light heart ; but it don't follow that I wish my funeral to be undertaken just yet. I vote for getting about without loss of time.'

'Bosh !' growled Charley, who had that fine belief in himself which distinguished the Irvine brotherhood, and who did not much care about being dictated to by Londoners. 'What do *you* vote for, Clare ?'

Clare had not paid much heed to the discussion. She was sitting with her back towards the disputants, her elbow resting on the gunwale and her cheek on her hand. She started and turned round on being addressed. 'Oh, I don't care,' she answered. 'Do as you think best. Perhaps we had better go on, now that we have come so far.'

'Clare doesn't know anything about it,' cried Adrian impatiently.

'Come to that, I'm not sure that you know a great deal about it yourself,' retorted Charley.

For a moment Adrian was half inclined to quarrel with the boy, whose tone was disagreeably aggressive ; but he reflected that, after all, the boat was not his, and he disliked rows. So with something of a laugh he said, 'Take your own way, then ; only don't blame me if three corpses are laid out on the shining sands to-morrow morning.'

'I'll promise not to say a word if I'm one of 'em,' answered Charley, his good-humour returning with the submission of his opponent. 'It's all right, my dear chap. I ought to know something about this coast, seeing that I was born and bred here, and I've never drowned anybody yet.'

'Never had the chance, perhaps,' muttered Adrian ; but he said no more, not liking to appear over-timorous, and at this moment the sun, which had become gradually obscured by a thin veil of mist, suddenly burst forth, as if to show that there was no ground for his apprehensions.

For a considerable time nobody spoke. Charley was whistling softly, and every now and then relinquishing the tiller to raise his hands as though he were holding a gun and taking an imaginary shot at a gull overhead ; Clare, who had brought a book with her, had opened it and was pretending to read ; while Adrian, with his hands in his pockets and his head thrown back, was trying to hit upon something terse and original to say about M. Zola and his school in the next number of the *Anglo-Saxon*. He was not very successful, for the slow motion, the silence, and the salt-laden atmosphere were less adapted to stimulate the brain than to induce that pleasant vacuity of mind which commonly precedes slumber, and his thoughts wandered idly away in all directions until he ceased attempting to control them. But off Towan Head the breeze fell light, and then died away altogether, the sail flapping and cracking as the little boat rolled heavily in the ever-increasing swell.

'This is very disagreeable,' remarked Clare, rousing herself and shutting up her book. 'Are we likely to be becalmed much longer, do you think ?'

'I don't think we are,' answered her husband, with an upward glance.

The sun had vanished again by this time ; the sky had changed from silvery grey to a dull leaden hue, and overhead detached streamers of scud were sailing up from the southwest. Even as Adrian spoke a sudden puff of wind caught them and swept past, making a dark shadow upon the water, and bringing with it a few drops of rain.

'Just catch hold of those brails, Adrian, will you ?' said Charley, 'and haul on them when I tell you.—Clare, you might as well take the sheet, if you don't mind. No, not like that!—don't let it slip through your fingers !'

But, indeed, it was no such easy matter for a lady to retain command over the sheet, which was tugging against her like a live thing ; for now the wind had overtaken them in good earnest, and the 'Midget' was tearing through the water at a speed which soon made it necessary to shorten sail. The sea was covered with white caps, and what with the spray and the

stinging rain, our three mariners, who had omitted to provide themselves with macintoshes, were wet through in five minutes. Adrian glanced at Clare, who looked a little startled, but did not seem to be frightened, and then at Charley, whose face expressed considerable uneasiness. The latter nudged him presently, and, pointing to a stretch of sand dimly visible through the rain and mist, called out, 'Poddly Joke ! Do you see.'

'I see Poddly, if that's its name,' growled Adrian ; 'but hang me if I can see the joke ! What the devil are you going to do, man ?' he asked, seeing that Charley had relieved Clare of the sheet, and was now steering straight for the shore.

'Beach her,' replied the other laconically.

'You *can't*, you lunatic !'

'Must,' answered Charley in a low voice ; 'it's our only chance. We couldn't live in such a sea as there'll be in another hour. As it is, I think we shall just manage it, because the surf can't be really very bad yet ; but we shall get a ducking, of course. Don't make a row, there's a good chap ; I don't want to frighten Clare. You must look after her. You know what to do, and I've seen you swim.'

Adrian was a good swimmer, certainly, but it seemed doubtful whether that accomplishment would stand him in much stead now. He moved forward a little and looked towards the shore, which they were rapidly approaching, and where he could make out the figures of three men, who were waving their arms and apparently shouting directions. Neither their voices nor their gesticulations, however, were intelligible ; and if they had been, it would probably have been too late to profit by them. When Adrian heard the thunder of the breakers and saw the long stretch of white foam ahead, his heart stood still. But there was no use in talking about it. He hooked his arm firmly into Clare's and led her to the extremity of the bows.

'Listen, Clare,' he said ; 'the moment you feel the boat touch you must jump—don't fall if you can help it—and run for your life. I shall keep tight hold of you. Do you understand ?'

She nodded ; and Adrian noted with a slight glow of pride that she neither trembled nor wasted her breath in needless words. If they were to be drowned, it would be no fault of hers, at all events.

They were in the broken water now ; the bewildering whiteness of the surf was all around them ; the boat was lifted

high, and Adrian stiffened his muscles for a spring. But by bad steering they missed the crest of the wave which should have carried them on ; it raced past them ; the boat seemed to halt and stagger ; and Adrian, knowing what must come, shouted, ‘Now, Clare !’ and jumped over.

At the same instant he was knocked clean off his legs, and with a roar of waters in his ears and a confused sense of being swept into eternity, darkness closed in upon him.

When he came to himself he was sitting upon the sand, surrounded by a little group, one member of which caught him by the arm as he tried to stand, and staggered dizzily. ‘ You’m a bit mazed yet, sir,’ said this stalwart individual. ‘ Twur the mast as knocked you silly ; but ’tis only a bit of a bruise, and the young lady, she’ve got no hurt.’

‘ It’s all right, Adrian,’ chimed in Charley, whose dripping figure now came to the front. ‘ That last wave snapped the mast, and I suppose it must have caught you on the back of the head as it fell. Clare and I were rolled up, none the worse, except that we had all the breath knocked out of us.’

‘ What has become of the boat ?’ asked Adrian, still a little uncertain as to where he was and what had happened.

‘ Oh, the boat has gone to glory ; and I’m bound to say that I rather think we should have followed her if it hadn’t been for our good friends here.’

‘ Seemeth as us was sent down providential,’ remarked the first speaker. ‘ If you’d ha’ done as we telled ‘ee, sir, and bore away under the land yonder, we might ha’ saved the boat ; but ’tis sinful to complain when no lives is lost.’

This was quite the view taken by the late occupants of the ‘ Midget,’ who were soon able to walk to a neighbouring farmhouse, where a change of clothing was found for them. Clare was a good deal bruised and shaken ; but she did not think it worth while to mention this in answer to Adrian’s inquiries, and assured him that a wetting was no new experience to her. He attributed her gravity and her brief replies to the natural effect of the shock which she had received, not knowing what a terrible moment she had passed through when she had seen her husband stretched, apparently lifeless, upon the shore.

She and he were left alone together before long, for Charley had set off to Newquay to procure a conveyance ; and as they sat in the little parlour of the farmhouse, before the fire which had been kindled for them, it seemed as if now or never must be the time for them to compose their differences. Yet neither

of them spoke for five minutes or so, and when Adrian at last opened his lips it was only to observe,—

‘That was a near thing, Clare.’

‘Oh, yes !’ she answered, catching her breath. And then, with a sort of sob, ‘I thought you were dead !’

‘Did you ? And I let you go, after all. What should I have done if you had been drowned, and I had been washed up alive ! I’ll tell you what, Clare : I’m going to give those three fellows ten pounds apiece. The price of a magazine article—h’m ! Well, perhaps we ought to double it ; but I am a poor man. What do you think ? Are we worth more than fifteen pounds each ?’

‘I don’t know,’ answered Clare, looking at the fire ; ‘I don’t think I’m worth much.’ She rose and crossed to her husband’s chair, saying timidly, ‘Adrian, were you much hurt ?’ She passed her hand over the back of his head, where indeed there was a very respectable bump. ‘Oh, you poor boy !’ she exclaimed, ‘it must pain you dreadfully ! May I bathe it ?’

Adrian burst out laughing, with tears in his eyes, and caught her by both hands. ‘*May* you ? No, you may not ; because it doesn’t want bathing. Oh, Clare, don’t you think we are a couple of fools ?’

Clare dropped upon her knees beside him, and buried her face on his shoulder. ‘I have been so miserable !’ she murmured brokenly. ‘I want to make friends again. Will you ?’

It is to be supposed that Adrian’s answer must have been of a satisfactory nature ; for when Charley returned, full of apologies for having been absent such an unconscionable time, he was assured, in the face of patent facts, by those whom he had kept waiting, that he had not been away an hour.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CLOUDS AFTER THE RAIN

OF all ways of ending a quarrel, the best, probably, is to shake hands and say no more about it. The great majority of quarrels arise from faults on both sides ; so that any re-discussion of their original cause is but too apt to bring about a renewal

of the hostilities which it is intended to close. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this general rule, and it was certainly a little unfortunate that Clare and Adrian, in their eagerness to become reconciled, should have carefully shunned all reference to the lady whose vagaries had so nearly created a lasting breach between them. A few direct questions and honest answers would have set Clare's mind at rest ; but neither question nor answer passed, and so what might have been a solid peace remained little more than a truce, to which some trifles might at any moment put a term.

And in a very short time the requisite trifle was forthcoming. Entering the breakfast-room rather late one morning, Adrian saw, among the letters beside his plate, one addressed in Lady St Austell's bold, flowing hand, and had an intuitive conviction that Clare had seen it too. Now, in the early days of their married life the young couple had thoughtlessly agreed to make their letters common property, and although the custom had lately fallen into abeyance, it had never been formally abrogated. Thus, after breakfast, Clare asked in a matter-of-course way to be shown Adrian's batch of correspondence, which it was out of the question that she should see in its entirety ; for one of the letters ran as follows :

‘Kilmuir Castle, Inverness, N.B., Aug. 20.

‘Dear Mr. Vidal,—I have been thinking a great deal about you during the last few days, and I have always noticed that when I take these fits of thinking about my friends, they are in need of help. Of course you will not admit that you are bored to death at Polruth, but I feel convinced that you *are* bored ; so I write to say that we have room for you here whenever you can summon up courage to defy your jailers and escape over the border. You might even bring the head-jailer with you if you liked ; only then you would have to telegraph to me, so that I might send her an invitation in due form. But I really think you had better give yourself a holiday, and come alone. We have a very cheery house-party, and I dare say you have heard that the birds are unusually wild this year. Or is it the reverse that they ought to be ? I know nothing about sporting matters ; but I do know that Lord St. Austell has been in a good humour for three days running, which shows that all must be well.

‘I wonder whether you caught it that afternoon when Mrs. Vidal came in so unexpectedly and found you in Grosvenor Square ? *I* did. First I was attacked by Lord St. Austell,

who accused me of having made myself "conspicuous" with a certain person who shall be nameless, and showed me a disgraceful paragraph in the *Anglo-Saxon* about which I shall have a word or two to say to you when we meet. Then Mr. Heriot took up his parable, and preached me such a sermon as I never listened to in my life before. Between ourselves, I suspect him of being a little sweet on the head-jailer; for he waxed quite eloquent about her, and was in a terrible state of fuss because he thought I wanted to rob her of her captive. I don't want to rob anybody; but I do think that, considering how good your conduct is, you might occasionally be let out on a ticket-of-leave. I have several things to talk to you about; so please make up your mind to join us, and believe me, yours always,

'JULIA ST. AUSTELL.'

Evidently, such a missive as this could not be delivered into the hands of the person pleasantly described as the head-jailer. Adrian might mutter, 'Confound the woman!' and declare to himself that he had never given her any excuse for being so impertinent; but he well knew that to ask Clare to believe that statement in the presence of documentary evidence to the contrary, would be asking for a good deal more than he was likely to get. When, therefore, she made the request above mentioned, he simply handed her over a few lines from Pilkington upon matters of business, a couple of bills, a very lengthy communication from an obsequious wine merchant, and an offer on the part of a German lottery-agent to secure him, in return for one sovereign, a good chance of winning 'the large sum of 30,000*l.* sterling.'

'And the other?' said Clare quietly.

'Oh, the other was from Lady St. Austell, asking me—at least, asking us—to go and stay with them in Scotland. Of course we shan't go.'

Clare raised her eyebrows. 'Why did she write to you instead of to me, I wonder?'

'Well, she wanted to know if there was a chance of your accepting the invitation.'

Then followed the inevitable question, 'May I see what she says?' and the evasive answer, which was perhaps equally inevitable. In a very short space of time this hapless couple were as much at cross-purposes as if they had never been half drowned at Poddly Joke at all. Adrian felt that Fate was

treating him with unmerited harshness. He was forced to acknowledge that Clare was not wholly unreasonable this time; and yet he could neither do what she wanted him to do, nor give any plausible reason for refusing. ‘Surely,’ he exclaimed, after a somewhat painful interchange of words, which there is no need to record, ‘we are not going to be so silly as to quarrel again about this woman !’

‘I don’t mean to quarrel anymore, Adrian,’ answered Clare sadly ; ‘quarrelling will never make things any better. But it is no fault of mine if you have to choose between me and Lady St. Austell.’

‘What do you mean ?’ he asked anxiously

‘Oh, nothing that need alarm you,’ she replied, with a touch of bitterness. ‘I shall not speak to any one else about the matter, and there will be no scandal. Only, if you claim liberty, I claim it too, and we must lead separate lives after this, though we may remain under the same roof. Perhaps, after all, that is what you will think the most sensible plan.’

‘Clare,’ said Adrian, ‘I give you my honour as a gentleman that I care no more for Lady St. Austell than for—for old Mrs. Treweeke. Surely you must believe me.’

‘Yes,’ she answered calmly, ‘I believe you, since you tell me that it is so. But that is not enough. I don’t understand your distinctions ; I don’t know where you consider that flirtation ends and love begins ; and I think I have a right to say that you must belong to me altogether or not at all. If you care enough for me to accept that bargain, and if you care for Lady St. Austell as little as you say, you will show me her letter.’

The demand was, no doubt, justifiable, although it might have been less peremptorily put. Adrian met it by producing Lady St. Austell’s letter, which he tore into fragments and scattered to the four winds of Heaven. ‘I am not prepared to demonstrate my innocence by unquestionable proofs at every step,’ he remarked. ‘You tell me in one breath that you believe what I say, and that I must do so-and-so before you will be convinced that I am speaking the truth.’

Clare flushed a little when she saw the scraps of paper fluttering away in the breeze ; but she answered tranquilly enough, ‘That was not what I said ; but it doesn’t much signify. You will be able to write and receive what letters, you please in future, for I shall never ask to see them again.’ And, so saying, she left him.

There was one letter which it was incumbent upon Adrian to write that day, and he was at first inclined to make it a very rude one. When, however, he remembered that his correspondent would infallibly detect the cause of his ill-humour, and be amused by it, he changed his mind, and despatched a short note thanking Lady St. Austell for her kind invitation, which he regretted that he was not able to accept, and merely remarking casually, ‘I must have given you some false impression as to my being bored at Polruth. If I am a prisoner here, I am a very willing one.’ He added a few commonplaces, by way of showing that he was too indifferent to Lady St. Austell’s insinuations to be offended by them, and flattered himself that he had conveyed a snub as delicately and effectually as the case permitted.

Snubbing a woman who has involved you in domestic broils is not, however, of much more practical use than killing a wasp after it has stung you, and Adrian knew that his wife would not have been contented with the delicacy of this snub, even if she had been informed of it. Her position was a perfectly intelligible one. He had only to promise that he would drop Lady St. Austell’s acquaintance, and all past transgressions should be blotted out. But this was what he did not choose to do. He thought that he understood the nature of women, and that concessions seldom move them towards generosity. Supposing that he made the renunciation demanded of him now, other renunciations would assuredly be demanded of him before long, and the end of it would be that his wife would become what Lady St. Austell had called her, his jailer—a very kind jailer, no doubt, still a jailer. He judged it best, therefore, to submit to present discomfort, and trusted vaguely that in process of time Clare would ‘come round.’

Of course she did nothing of the kind ; of course, every day that Adrian remained estranged from her, and was apparently resigned to the estrangement, lessened the probability of her doing so ; of course, also, the said estrangement was more easily consented to than concealed. It ended by becoming apparent even to Mrs. Irvine ; and she, good soul, was far from sharing Heriot’s conviction of the futility of interference. She attacked both the young people in turn with inquiries as to what was the matter, would not take ‘Nothing’ for an answer, and gave them and herself a world of bother before it dawned upon her that she had much better hold her tongue.

All this rendered residence at Cardrew far from pleasant to Adrian, who, nevertheless, did not suffer as much as Clare. He partly forgot the contrariness of things when he was at work, and justified Mr. Wilbraham's appreciation of the artistic temperament by putting a good deal of his sorrowful experience into picturesque language for the subsequent delectation of the public. And then, in the month of September, he obtained what he could not but regard as a happy release. Under other circumstances he would have unhesitatingly declined an invitation to go to some friends in Warwickshire for a few days' shooting, but now he jumped at it; and he made himself so agreeable to his entertainers, that when the few days were up he was entreated to remain a little longer; after which he was asked to go on to another house, and thence to a third, so that the few days lengthened themselves out into six weeks, and it seemed hardly worth while to return to Cornwall at all.

Clare joined him in London early in November. He had some faint hope that by this time she might have 'come round,' but was speedily undeceived. She had looked the situation in the face, had determined upon her line of action, and had no thought of swerving from it. Since it was her destiny to be such a wife as Adrian had described in print—such a wife as, by all accounts, many women were condemned to be in these evil days—she would accept what she could not avoid without the scandal of an open separation. Henceforth she would do as others did, and ignore her husband's flirtations if it pleased him to indulge in any. What she would not submit to was the insult of a pretended love.

She was not insulted in that way. Habit heals most hurts, and Adrian was becoming accustomed to the changed order of his life. So long as there were no rows, domesticity was at least endurable—especially when you didn't have too much of it. Plenty of his friends of both sexes had returned to London, and were very glad to see him again. Many a pleasant afternoon and evening did he spend among them, and many a little dinner did he organise, to be followed by an adjournment to one of the theatres. Clare entertained them when he chose to invite them to his house, but seldom accompanied him when he went to theirs. She found plays tedious, she said, and he took her at her word. She had been of a different opinion once; but then that was a whole year ago.

He was walking down Bond Street one afternoon when he was stopped by a footman, who muttered something; and

looking in the direction from which the man had come, he was aware of a certain smart victoria which he had not expected to see in London at that season of the year. The lady who was seated in it, wrapped in sables, the value of which would have kept a whole street-full of her husband's tenantry from cold and hunger through the winter months, held out a little gloved hand to him, saying, 'Where are you going this dismal afternoon? Come home with me, and I will give you a cup of tea.'

And so presently Adrian was in the carriage, and progressing rapidly towards Grosvenor Square.

Lady St. Austell confined her observations to harmless generalities on the way; but when she and her guest were seated before the fire, with the tea-table between them, she leant forward and said gently, 'Why were you so angry with me for asking you to come to us in Scotland? An invitation isn't generally considered an affront.'

Adrian sighed. He was not going to let her know what good cause for anger she had given him; but after a moment he answered, 'You put your invitation in a way that would have affronted a good many people.'

Lady St. Austell laughed a little. 'You didn't like my taking it for granted that you must be bored at Polruth. Well, I apologise. You were not bored—you couldn't be bored. And have you remained on at Polruth ever since I heard from you?'

'Not quite ever since,' answered Adrian. 'I went away towards the end of the time to get a little shooting, and then I stayed about with different friends for a few weeks.'

'By yourself?'

'My wife was not with me. Of course, she wanted to see as much of her own family as she could.'

'Very natural and creditable on her part. What sort of houses have you been staying in?—and whom did you meet? Any pretty people?'

'Pretty? Well, yes, I suppose some of them were rather pretty. I really didn't notice particularly.'

'Oh, nonsense! Don't tell me that Mrs. Vidal hasn't catechised you about them. I am sure she knows exactly how many of them were pretty, and exactly how pretty the pretty ones were.'

'Indeed she doesn't. She has never asked me a single question about them.'

'Really! Well, I am more inquisitive. Tell me who they all were, if you please.'

Adrian smiled and complied with her request, running over a string of names, which she interrupted by an impatient gesture.

'That will do: I never heard of any of them in my life. Now I am going to ask you a question which will make you cross. No: on second thoughts, I won't ask the question, because you have unintentionally answered it already. I will make an assertion instead. You and Mrs. Vidal have been having a slight difference of opinion. Will you think me very horrid if I say that I am not sorry for it? I knew that it must come some day, and I am rejoiced that you have had the courage to stand up for yourself. Since you were going to pay visits, you might have come to me; but never mind that. The great thing is that you have declared your independence. I have no doubt that Mrs. Vidal has many charming qualities, and I have always been the first to admit that she has a charming face; but—'

'If it's quite the same thing to you,' broke in Adrian, 'I'd rather not discuss her. Won't you tell me how you have been spending the autumn, and what brings you to London?'

'That won't take long. After we left Scotland, we were in Hertfordshire for a time, and then we went to Newmarket for the Cambridgeshire. I suppose you know that Lord St. Austell's horse won.'

'Yes, I saw it in the papers,' answered Adrian. 'I hope he made a pot of money.'

'I can't say; but I should think he did, for he was amiability itself for some days after the race. Now he has departed for Paris with some other young fellows of his own standing, and I believe he talks of going on to Monaco. I only hope he will, because then I shall not be wanted to entertain people before Christmas; and I do so hate the country at this time of year? If I can manage it, I shall stay where I am until he comes back to England. And perhaps,' she added, with a smile, 'you will sometimes look in upon me in my loneliness.'

He said he would. Lady St. Austell had a way of talking to him which put him upon good terms with himself, and he had no longer any reason for wishing to avoid her.

'Why won't you treat me like a friend?' she asked softly, holding his hand while she bade him good-bye. 'You might

do worse than tell me your troubles. I have had a great deal of experience, and, above all, I am a woman. I think I could give you some good advice, if you would let me.'

The upshot of this interview was that it was succeeded by several others, in the course of which Adrian was persuaded to open his heart in some degree to this friendly sympathiser. He only half trusted her; but a confidant of any kind was a boon to him, and Lady St. Austell showed a great power of participation in his feelings. As for advice, it must be confessed that she had not much of that to offer. On the other hand, she had plenty of compassion at his service. Of the institution of marriage she spoke with pathetic eloquence. A careless observer might have thought that Lady St. Austell's bonds weighed lightly upon her; but such, it appeared, was not the case. Ah, no! She, like others, knew what it was to marry in haste and repent at leisure. That was why she was able to feel so deeply for those who had made a similar mistake. To be linked to an uncongenial fellow-captive, without hope of escape, was bad enough; but how much worse did it become when—as so often happened—you met too late the one person who could have made you happy, and whom you, perhaps, might have made happy, had the Fates been propitious! There were tears—real tears—in Lady St. Austell's eyes while she discoursed thus.

Adrian was not much to blame if he understood himself to be the person alluded to in these plaintive murmurings, because that was precisely what he was meant to understand; but he is as open to as much blame as the reader may please to adjudge to him for finding the discovery rather agreeable than otherwise. He was not in the least in love with Lady St. Austell; but a little sentimentality was what he had never yet been able to help enjoying, and this woman was past mistress of the art of flirtation. The truth—if Adrian had only known it—was that she had taken his measure. In the beginning of their acquaintance she had been a little bit afraid of him. Her knowledge of mankind had, up to that time, been derived from observation of a class to which he did not belong—a class composed of younger sons, Guardsmen, building politicians, and the like—and she had not been sure whether the author of '*Satiety*' might not be rather too clear-sighted a person to be imposed upon by the cajoleries that pleased those simple folk; but having now discovered that he was quite as great a fool as the rest of them, she felt her feet upon

firm ground, and brought all her accustomed arts to bear upon him. She had quite discarded the flippant manner which characterised her at ordinary times ; she had soft modulations in her voice which were calculated to reach the toughest heart ; and she always took care to sit with her back to the light.

It may be hoped that the result of so much painstaking endeavour proved satisfactory to Lady St. Austell ; but whether it did or not, there was one humble member of her household to whom Mr. Vidal's frequent appearances in Grosvenor Square were a source of pure delight. One evening, as Adrian was descending the staircase, the baize door alluded to in a former chapter was suddenly flung open, and the figure of Susan Bowman, erect and silent, like an avenging apparition, barred his passage. He was not altogether taken by surprise, for he had often thought that some such episode would occur sooner or later ; and he was able to say quite calmly and good-humouredly :

‘ Well, Susan, how are you ? I am glad to find that you have dropped into such a good situation.’

This was rather a disappointment to Susan, who had been at some little pains to contrive her *coup de théâtre*, and who had expected that her faithless lover would have turned pale and stagger back in dismay. So she returned, with considerable acrimony, ‘ Oh, you knew I was here, did you ? Some people have plenty of cheek ! I suppose it never came into your head that, living in this house and seeing what goes on in it, I might have something interesting to say to your wife about you and her ladyship.’

Adrian immediately put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket ; and if he had known how very near he was, for a moment, to having his face slapped, he would probably have thought twice before committing himself to that suggestive action.

But Susan remembered that various domestics were lurking in the hall below, and put a curb upon the promptings of nature. ‘ I want to speak to you,’ she said rapidly and in a low voice. ‘ Meet me to-morrow afternoon by the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens at four o'clock sharp. Do you understand ? ’

‘ Really, Susan——’

‘ Really, Mr. Vidal, you'll do as I tell you, or you'll repent it. No ; I'm not to be bought off this time. Keep your

money in your pocket, and don't be late to-morrow afternoon, unless you want to drive me to do what you will be sorry for.'

It seemed to Adrian that he had better yield. Susan was rather alarming with her vague menaces ; it was wiser to keep friends with her than quarrel with her ; and at four o'clock on a winter's afternoon it is so dark that one may meet anybody in Kensington Gardens without appreciable risk. So he said, 'Very well, then,' and went his way pensively.

CHAPTER XXV

DE WYNT UPON MARRIAGE

ONE of the first visitors whom Clare received after her return home was Mr. De Wynt ; and it was with sincere regret that she informed him that Miss Vidal would not be in London that autumn. 'I asked her to come to us, and at first she seemed quite inclined to accept ; but now it appears that she has changed her mind, and I'm afraid we shan't see her again before the spring.'

De Wynt shook his head ruefully. 'I've heard from her too,' he remarked. 'Of course you've seen her book, "The Islands of the Blest." Awfully clever ; don't you think so ?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Clare, who was not pleased with her sister-in-law. 'Travels don't interest me much, as a rule. Next year, I suppose, we shall have a companion volume, with a representation on the cover of Georgina driving a team of reindeer, and an aurora borealis in the background. Did she tell you that she proposes to spread this winter in driving through the north of Norway and Sweden ?'

'Yes ; she mentioned it. I knew she would be off somewhere. I told you so, if you remember.'

'How ridiculous it is of her !' exclaimed Clare impatiently.

'Oh, I shouldn't call it ridiculous. I think it's very plucky of her, you know. From a selfish point of view, I should be very glad if she would give up globe-trotting ; but then it wouldn't do to tell her so. It's no business of mine, you see.'

'No business of yours, Mr. De Wynt ?'

The little man laughed. ‘Well, Mrs. Vidal, I think you know what my hopes—if I may venture to call them hopes—are. I haven’t made much secret of them, anyhow. You think me faint-hearted; but you make a mistake. I’m nothing of the kind, and I would ask her to be my wife to-morrow if I didn’t know that it would be worse than useless. I’ve often thought over what you said about my asserting myself; but I am convinced that the time hasn’t come for me to do that with any chance of success.’

‘It seems to me that you have just as good a chance now as you will have next year; and Georgina herself once told me that she could never respect a man who didn’t make her obey him,’ said Clare, diplomatically suppressing a portion of the statement referred to.

‘Ah, that’s because she takes an altogether wrong view of marriage. According to my notion, there ought not to be any question of commanding or obeying on either side.’

‘The marriage service,’ observed Clare, ‘makes a woman promise to love, honour, and obey her husband.’

‘Yes; but she can’t love him if he beats her, and she can’t honour him if he gets drunk every night; and as a good many husbands do both, the marriage service has no business to make people promise what they may find it impossible to perform. As to Miss Vidal, my idea is that she ought to be allowed plenty of rope. In process of time she is sure to get tired of a wandering life; and then, don’t you see, she may very likely say to herself, “I have had about enough of this; and there’s De Wynt ready and waiting. He isn’t much to look at, and he isn’t overburdened with brains, but he’s a good-natured little beggar, and he has been constant for a fairish number of years.” At least, that’s what I hope for.’

‘You seem to have thought it all out in a very dispassionate and unromantic way,’ Clare remarked.

‘Well, yes; I’m afraid I am rather unromantic; but then I flatter myself that I have a good deal of what you might call “staying power” in me, and that always tells in the long run. It’s a family gift. My old uncle has it in a remarkable degree.’

‘Has your uncle grown old while waiting for somebody to marry him?’ asked Clare.

‘Oh, no; it takes another form with him—the form of living. He is nearer eighty than seventy now, but he can do a day’s shooting as well as anybody, and he told me last month,

when I was down at his place, that I needn't hope to succeed him for another twenty years. I think that was a little bit of swagger, though, put on to annoy me. Not that I want to hurry him ; only, of course, I shall be a good deal better off when he goes aloft ; and a man with a decent property does feel rather more confidence in making an offer of marriage than a Government clerk. But I mustn't bore you any more, Mrs. Vidal ; it's very good of you to have listened to me so long.'

Clare, however, assured him that he did not bore her at all, and that she was greatly interested in his prospects. 'I haven't many things to interest me nowadays—I mean, in London,' she added, with a sigh.

So Mr. De Wynt, whose admiration for Mrs. Vidal was second only to the admiration which he felt for her sister-in-law, grew to be as steady a frequenter of the house in Alexandra Gardens as he had been earlier in the year. He soon discovered that things were not going quite smoothly there, and, by dint of making use of his eyes and ears, arrived at a tolerably clear understanding of the facts ; after which it became his chief object to divert Mrs. Vidal's thoughts from her grievances. He was himself a very simple, honest, and clean-living little fellow ; but he had seen too much of the world to be greatly scandalised or indignant at Vidal's supposed infidelity. He only thought, as Lord St. Austell had done, that the man had shocking bad taste, and so dismissed him from his mind. But that Mrs. Vidal should be made unhappy gave him greater concern, and he immediately set his brains to work to devise consolations for her. His strategy was of a very transparent kind ; but she lent herself to it, accepting, not ungratefully, his well-meant efforts to cheer her up.

'There are some rather good pictures at the French Artists this year, they say,' he remarked one afternoon ; 'I wish you would take me to see them, Mrs. Vidal.—And, Vidal, you'll come too, won't you ?'

Adrian answered that he would with pleasure ; but when the next morning came he told Clare that he was afraid he could hardly manage it. 'You see, I have a lot of things to do, and I can't well sacrifice a whole afternoon. But I am sure De Wynt will be delighted to look after you, and I'll join you at the gallery if I can.'

Clare said 'Very well.' She never inquired now how Adrian spent his time ; but he was accustomed to speak of

himself as being very busy, and latterly he had taken to lunching at his club, so that she did not often see him between the hours of breakfast and dinner. She supposed that he was a good deal at the office of the *Anglo-Saxon*, and hardly expected that he would be able, as he said, to 'sacrifice a whole afternoon' to her.

Nor was she much surprised when he failed to keep his appointment at the picture-gallery. She and De Wynt walked conscientiously round, with their catalogues in their hands, examining the works of art, in which, perhaps, neither of them felt any absorbing interest, and, after having accomplished this duty, sat down and waited until it became evident that waiting any longer would be useless. Then Clare said that she would be glad of a little exercise, and that if Mr. De Wynt wouldn't mind walking as far as Park Lane with her, she would take a hansom for the rest of the way. It was no great favour to ask ; for she knew that De Wynt never wearied of company in which he could freely ventilate his dreams of future bliss ; and, indeed, he embarked upon the familiar theme as soon as they were out in the street.

'I wish we had Miss Vidal with us,' he began. 'She is a first-rate judge of a picture, and she would have told us what to admire, and why to admire it. You can always depend upon her, don't you know. If she begins to talk about a subject, you may be sure she understands it ; and if she doesn't know anything about it, she'll say so like a shot. I think I never met any one so perfectly honest as she is.'

Clare made the perfunctory murmur of approbation which she knew was expected of her. She had heard this eulogium pronounced a dozen or so of times already, and one can't always work one's self up to enthusiasm over the virtues of one's friends.

'And genuine honesty isn't such a common thing, you know,' De Wynt went on. 'Look at me, for instance. I don't think I am more of an impostor than my neighbours, but I shouldn't like to admit that I was utterly ignorant about art ; though if I know a Meissonier from a Bouguereau, it's about as much as I do. A humble individual like myself can't afford such luxuries as absolute candour. In fact, I don't see how one could get on in society at all without being rather a humbug in some ways.'

'That is just what I think,' agreed Clare, with more animation ; 'and that is why I don't like society.'

'Yes ; but if one does like society—as I confess that I do—and if one wants to be liked by society in return, it isn't possible to be quite so outspoken as Miss Vidal. I admire her honesty immensely ; but naturally it must get her into trouble every now and then.'

'You will have to cure her of it,' remarked Clare with a smile.

'Oh no,' answered De Wynt, quite seriously ; 'I should never attempt that. If I ever have the good luck to be her husband, I know very well that she will cause me some moments of intense anguish by telling my friends plainly what she thinks of them, and so on ; but that is not the sort of thing that I should ask her to give up. One mustn't try to alter people's natures. My notion of marriage, as I was saying to you the other day, is that there ought to be a good deal of give and take about it. It isn't fair that one of two people should be always dictating to the other ; and I am persuaded that the real reason why so many couples who should be the best of friends don't get on is that they won't agree to differ upon certain points.'

'You allow that each side has a right to make conditions, though.'

'Certainly ; only they should be as few as possible, and they should be made beforehand. And, do you know, Mrs. Vidal, I think that, even if the conditions were not always observed very strictly, it would be just as well to take no notice. If people really care for each other, they can afford to overlook occasional breaches of contract, don't you think so ? Anyhow, it's better to do that than to be at loggerheads. Now I know a man—as good a fellow as ever stepped, and his wife is charming in every way ; only, unfortunately, they don't quite hit it off, so that they are anything but happy together. And I believe it is all because he did something that offended her long ago. Perhaps he was rather too attentive to another woman, or it may have gone beyond a little attention—I don't know. At all events, he would be only too thankful to make friends again ; and so, I fancy, would she. But she chooses to stand upon her dignity ; and so there it is.'

Clare had no difficulty in guessing to whom these observations were intended to apply ; but she was not offended ; indeed, it was hardly possible to be offended with so ingenuous a moralist. 'I have no doubt,' said she, 'that nine men out

of ten would agree with you as to what the injured person's conduct ought to be in that particular case ; but supposing that it had been the lady who had received a little attention—or something that had gone beyond a little attention—from another man ?'

'Ah, that's complicating the question unnecessarily. All I meant to say was that it is wisest to shut your eyes to the defects of those whom you love and who love you, and when you can't do that any longer—well, to forgive them.'

'And how many times is one to forgive ?'

'Seventy times seven, Mrs. Vidal,' answered the little man stoutly. But the moderation of his nature compelled him to add, under his breath, 'Though I must say that's rather a large order. Twelves in four hundred and ninety—h'm ! once a month for upwards of forty years. No ; I should hope one wouldn't be required to forgive upon such a very extensive scale as that.'

But Clare did not notice this muttered recantation. Her companion's reply had taken her somewhat aback, and had caused her to ask herself whether, after all, she was justified in insisting upon what she still considered to be her right. And did it matter very much whether she was justified or not ? Secretly, she had hoped all along that Adrian would give in, just as he had hoped that she would do so ; and it had not been without dismay that she had observed how perfectly well able he was to enjoy life without giving in. Almost she felt inclined to withdraw what she had said at Cardrew, to be reconciled with her husband, and to throw herself upon his generosity, which surely would not fail her.

Thus, revolving many thoughts in her mind, she walked on ; while De Wynt, who had resumed his discourse, held forth to inattentive ears.

CHAPTER XXVI

PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE

It is obvious that the most direct route from the Gallery of French Artists to the cab-stand near Apsley House is *rid* Pall Mall, Waterloo Place, and Piccadilly ; but when people are deep in an interesting conversation they are apt to follow

their noses, and it must be presumed that De Wynt's nose, moving in sympathy with his mind, had led him to approach the desired end by a circuitous path. From the starting-point of Georgina's idiosyncrasies he had to make his way round through general reflections upon the philosophy of marriage to the particular instance of the lady who stood upon her dignity, and thence to the bearing of this sad case upon that of Mr. and Mrs. Vidal ; and so, being absorbed in the working out of his mental proposition, he crossed Regent Circus, headed up the Quadrant, involved himself in intricacies in the neighbourhood of Vigo Street, and did not pick himself up, so to speak, until he was on the other side of Bond Street, by which time he had propounded the startling theory of the four hundred and ninety pardons above mentioned, and was able to think of shaping a straight course for home.

Thus it was that Clare awoke from the dreams engendered by her relenting mood to find herself at the corner of Grosvenor Square, and within sight of a mansion which she had little reason to love. She glanced at it, as she might have glanced at the slough of a serpent, little imagining that it was no longer untenanted ; and as she looked, the doors were flung back, and somebody, running down the steps, walked swiftly away westwards, his umbrella under his arm, and his head bent, as though in thought. It was Adrian, who had just escaped from Miss Susan Bowman, and who assuredly would not have been congratulating himself upon that had he known what a singularly inopportune moment he had chosen for making his exit. But, happily for his peace of mind, he did not look over his shoulder as he hurried away ; and the shades of evening soon hid him from the gaze of two astonished pedestrians who were following him at a respectful distance. Both of them had recognised him, but neither thought it advisable to mention the fact. De Wynt, feeling that the good effect of his homily must be neutralised by this unexpected apparition, stopped short in the middle of a sentence ; and Clare, after walking some little distance without speaking, said, somewhat constrainedly, 'I must not take you any further, Mr. De Wynt. If you will stop a hansom for me, I think I will say good-bye now.'

The well-balanced mind is, of course, no more affected by knowledge which is conveyed to it through the medium of sight than by such as reaches it through hearing ; but a well-balanced mind is not a very common possession, and many

people who can read a minute account of some hideous railway accident without the smallest discomfort, turn sick if they happen to see a single individual break his leg. Clare, for her part, found that it was one thing to accept her husband's weakness for flirtation as an abstract fact, and quite another to catch him *in flagrante delicto*; and as the hansom bore her homewards her thoughts about him were very bitter. Forgive?—well, yes; she could forgive perhaps; but she certainly could not tell him so; she could not consent to share his affections with Lady St. Austell. There was no doubt in her mind now—or at all events only a remnant of doubt, which she refused to recognise—that his relations with that wicked woman had, as De Wynt would have phrased it, ‘gone beyond a little attention.’ What was Lady St. Austell doing in London in November? and why had Adrian concealed the fact that she was there? Why had he lied, saying that he would go to the picture-gallery that afternoon, when he never could have intended to do anything of the kind? If this were not strong presumptive evidence of guilt, what could be? Poor Clare felt a wild longing to escape from the choking atmosphere of deceit by which she was surrounded, to leave the man who had betrayed her, and to hide herself somewhere where he should never be able to find her again. She thought it would be almost impossible to maintain the demeanour of cold politeness which she had kept up so long, now that she knew what it was that caused Adrian to leave home early in the morning and remain away until night. If her baby had lived it would have been different. Then she would have borne everything for the child’s sake: but for whose sake was she to submit to neglect and insult now?

But this despairing phase of feeling passed away. In spite of all her indignation, she knew that Adrian had as yet given her no ostensible excuse for refusing to live with him any longer; and something—it may have been the aforementioned remnant of doubt—enabled her to enter the drawing-room before dinner with a face only a little graver and paler than usual.

Adrian was already dressed, and was standing before the fire, reading the evening paper. He wore the cheerful aspect of one who does not know that he has been found out. ‘I was sorry I couldn’t pick you up at the gallery this afternoon,’ he said, ‘but I knew De Wynt would look after you. It was all right, I suppose?’

'Perfectly right,' answered Clare, marvelling at his duplicity ; 'I never expected you to come.'

'Well, I fully intended to do so ; but, somehow, the time slipped away, and then it was too late. I hope you enjoyed it.'

Clare took up the newspaper which he had laid down, and made no reply ; but this did not arouse Adrian's suspicions. Of late it had become a habit of hers to leave a good many of his remarks unanswered. Presently he volunteered the information that he had seen Pilkington in the course of the afternoon, and that Pilkington was in a great stew about the *Anglo-Saxon*, which was not fulfilling his expectations.

'He says I'm the only man on his staff who isn't perpetually getting him into hot water, and that if the public won't understand the theory of individual responsibility for signed articles he shall throw the thing up.'

Clare only looked up from her paper for an instant to say, 'Really ?'

It was rather irritating. Lady St. Austell, to whom he had given the same intelligence an hour or two before, had seen at once how important it was, in the interest of contemporary literature, that Mr. Pilkington should be restrained from carrying out his threat. But contemporary literature seemed to have lost its charms for Clare. Adrian doubted whether she was even reading the serial story by him which was then appearing in the '*Cosmopolitan Magazine*', and she never asked any questions about the novel which he had on hand.

Not much conversation passed between them during dinner. By an unlucky mischance, the cook had upset the salt-cellar into the soup, and a calamity of that kind is what no man, however good-tempered, can allow to pass without comment. Adrian did not behave at all badly about it ; but he sent a sarcastic message to the kitchen, and Clare showed by her absolute silence that she took the rebuke as addressed to herself. That, again, was rather irritating. As soon as the melancholy repast was over, Adrian said he had work to do, and retired to his study ; while Clare, left alone in the drawing-room, stitched mechanically at her embroidery until it was time to go to bed.

Going to bed did not mean going to sleep. She tossed and turned half the night through, wondering how long this kind of life would last—how long she would be able to endure it ; and when at length she fell into a feverish doze, she

dreamt that she saw Adrian kneeling at Lady St. Austell's feet, that Lord St. Austell, surveying the couple through his eye-glass, was laughing ecstatically, and that De Wynt was saying to her, 'Very sorry for you, Mrs. Vidal ; but you've brought it upon yourself, you know. You ought to have taken my advice, and forgiven him before it was too late.'

The consequence was that she had a splitting headache in the morning, and felt justified in sending a message downstairs to say that she didn't want any breakfast, but would take a cup of tea and some dry toast in her bedroom. Upon the tray which was presently brought to her lay a letter ; and no sooner had she seen the handwriting than she recognised it as that of the anonymous correspondent to whom she was already indebted for some of the most miserable hours that she had ever spent. She tore open the envelope with trembling fingers ; and this was what her unknown informant had to say to her :

'You have been warned once that your husband is deceiving you ; but perhaps you think his word is more to be trusted than a stranger's. Well, seeing is believing. If you want to know a little more about him, go to the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens to-morrow afternoon, and walk among the trees on the north side till you have seen enough to satisfy you.'

CHAPTER XXVII

PROOF POSITIVE

ONLY those who have been long under the influence of a fixed idea can realise how difficult it is to bid farewell to hope. Susan Bowman ought, of course, to have perceived that her one chance of inducing Adrian to marry her was to strike while the iron was hot, and get the ceremony concluded before his brief passion burnt itself out. She had not done this because, for one thing, she had not felt perfectly sure of his pecuniary independence ; and for another, because Heriot had succeeded in convincing her that Mr. Vidal would never be dragged to the altar so long as he had coat-tails to be clung to and a friend to cling to them. She had, however, the heroic quality of not knowing when she was beaten. What she had

related of herself in St. James's Park was true, ridiculous as it may appear to the reader, and ridiculous as it did appear to the man she had hoped to win. The obstacles in the way of her marriage were, as had been pointed out to her, inferiority of birth and education. She set herself to work to render these less conspicuous by cultivating refinement, and reading such books as she could afford to buy. She employed means which perhaps would not have borne close scrutiny to obtain a nursery governess's place ; she had vague intentions of rising from that position to a somewhat higher one, of presenting herself to Adrian in the light of an equal, and calling upon him to redeem his promises.

The announcement of his marriage in the papers fell upon her, therefore, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky ; she felt that all her labour had been in vain, that she had been basely deceived, and that revenge became her well. Her imagination not being a very fertile one, the only vengeance that at first suggested itself to her was of the dagger and bowl order ; and this, in view of the existing state of the criminal law, seemed likely to prove as uncomfortable for avenger as for victim. Besides, she did not care about slaying Adrian. What she wanted to do was to make him suffer ; and we have seen how circumstances put it into her power to play the part of Nemesis. Her employer's garrulity kept her pretty well informed as to Mr. Vidal's domestic affairs. She knew that his wife was jealous ; she also knew that some cause for jealousy existed ; though precisely how much she had not been able to determine by a careful study of the letters which Lady St. Austell was too apt to leave lying in accessible places. These, it is true, were interesting and amusing reading : they gave a clue to the tone of modern society, and showed to what imprudent lengths young gentlemen of the Johnny Spencer type will commit themselves upon paper ; but unluckily there was not one amongst them that bore Mr. Vidal's signature ; and so Susan, who was growing tired of watching the progress of events, resolved to jog Time's elbow and create a few little events on her own score.

It was with a countenance expressive of joyous anticipation that she set forth to keep her tryst in Kensington Gardens ; and a cheering reflection it was to her that in the course of a few hours' time, if all went well, Adrian would be in the midst of a domestic tempest such as he had not yet been called upon to encounter, that he would assuredly involve himself in a net-

work of falsehood, and that the end of it would most likely be a temporary separation and a more or less public scandal.

Adrian was approaching the same spot at a more leisurely pace and with considerably less exultation. He was not much afraid of anything that Susan might say or do, and he had put twenty pounds in his pocket, in case ten should not be enough ; but these open-air meetings were not to his taste, nor did he like the prospect of the reproaches which he took it for granted would be hurled at his head before the inevitable demand for cash came. ‘I’m not going to do this kind of thing again,’ he muttered ; ‘and so I shall tell her. After all, what does it signify ? Let her come to Alexandra Gardens and kick up a row, if she chooses. I would have given a good deal to prevent her from doing that a year ago ; but now I suppose it would make very little difference.’

He sighed heavily, thinking that the world was rapidly becoming a dismal place of abode, and so reached his rendezvous in a frame of mind half petulant, half dejected. Looking warily about him in search of the person whom he had come to meet, he was much astonished to recognise in a solitary figure, separated from him by the breadth of the pond, not Susan, but Lady St. Austell ; and his astonishment was increased when her ladyship, after making him a slight but unmistakable sign to follow her, walked slowly away in the direction of the trees. He caught her up presently, and, taking off his hat, said, ‘Lady St. Austell, what has brought you to this damp place ?’

The lady addressed lifted her veil and disclosed the features of Miss Bowman.

‘It isn’t Lady St. Austell,’ she answered meekly ; ‘it’s only me.’

‘Oh, it’s you ?’ said Adrian, with some irritation. ‘And why have you dressed yourself up in your mistress’s clothes, if I may ask ?’

‘Call me a thief,’ returned Susan, in a low, sad voice ; ‘I shouldn’t be in the least surprised at your calling me anything. These are my own clothes, though. Her ladyship was kind enough to give them to me a few days ago, and I put them on because—because I thought perhaps you would like to see me looking nice. But of course you don’t care about that now ; I’m only a troublesome woman whom you’d be glad to be rid of. You won’t have long to wait, may be. I often think it would be easy enough to walk down to the river some night

and have an end of it all.' And here Susan heaved a sigh so profound that Lady St. Austell's dress, which, indeed, was somewhat too tight for the comfort of either its late or its present wearer, gave forth a warning crack.

'If there is one thing that I hate more than being rude to a woman,' said Adrian, quite unmoved by these pathetic words, 'it is beating about the bush on a cold, raw afternoon, instead of coming to the point. Therefore, Susan, you must try to forgive me if I say that we shall get on a great deal better without humbug. Tell me what you want of me, and you shall have it, so long as it is anything in reason.'

Susan turned away her head, as if to conceal her emotion. 'Do you think it is kind or just to talk to me like that?' she asked, with a little tremor in her voice. 'Have I ever done you an injury? Some people might say that it was you who had injured me.'

'I am sorry if I spoke unkindly, Susan,' answered Adrian, with a twinge of compunction; 'but you must remember that you addressed me in a very different tone yesterday, and that I am only here because you threatened me.'

'Yes; only because I threatened you. You wouldn't have come if I had asked you to do it as a favour to me. Well, well!—times are changed. Once you would have been glad enough to meet me anywhere; and now you say, "Tell me what you want and let me go." Suppose I wanted nothing, except to see you and talk to you again, and to walk a little way with you, as we used to walk when we were younger and happier than we are now?'

'I'm afraid I can't suppose that,' replied Adrian, who found this reproachful tenderness even more disagreeable than the rating which he had dreaded.

'Can't you? And yet that is all I ask of you, Adrian. Come, let us walk up and down under the trees for half an hour, and I will try to forget how miserable you have made me. You can spare me half an hour, perhaps. It isn't a great deal of time to give to a girl whom you once wished to spend your life with.'

She passed her arm through his, and led him across the damp grass and the fallen yellow leaves. The night was closing in fast, and a chilly fog was rising, through which the figures of the passers-by, hurrying along the broad gravel path, loomed dim and ghost-like.

'It looks dreary enough; one wouldn't think it had ever

been spring-time here. But the trees are happier than I am : they don't remember what they have lost,' remarked the melancholy Susan, unconsciously plagiarising from a poet of whom she had never heard.

Adrian was thoroughly uncomfortable. He didn't like being held by the arm, he didn't like being called by his Christian name, and he had a shrewd suspicion that he had not been brought there for purely sentimental purposes. Yet he hardly saw his way to escape. 'I think,' said he at length, 'that, considering all things, we might very well consent to let bygones be bygones. The last time that I walked with you, you gave me to understand that all you wished for was to be revenged upon me.'

Susan shook her head sadly. 'There's no need for that now. I have been revenged without doing anything to revenge myself. I know you are no more happy than I am. You regret your marriage now that it is too late.'

'You are drawing upon your imagination,' said Adrian coldly ; and he made an effort to free his arm, which, however, Susan only gripped more tightly.

'No, indeed,' she replied. 'I know a great many things --more than you suspect, perhaps. I know, for instance, that you don't really care for her ladyship, and that you only pretend to flirt with her because you want to forget how unhappy you are at home.'

'I don't wish to hurt your feelings,' returned Adrian, 'but you must excuse my telling you that speeches of that kind are very offensive to me.'

'The truth often is offensive,' remarked Susan sententiously. 'Ah, Adrian !' she added, with more warmth, clasping her hands round his arm as she spoke, and looking up into his face, 'the real truth is that you have never loved either of these women as you loved me once.'

This was more than the unfortunate man could stand. 'Really, Susan,' he said, shaking her off somewhat roughly, 'you had better understand the real truth yourself, once for all. It is true that when I was a boy I did for a short time fancy that I was in love with you ; but the fancy didn't last long, and when once it was gone, no power on earth could ever have brought it back again. If you knew how the recollection of that time humiliates and disgusts me, you would not be so eager to remind me of it.'

Susan had a gusty temper, which got the upper hand of

her sometimes when she herself least expected it. It came whirling forth now, and caused her to exclaim impetuously, ‘ You brute!—you miserable coward ! I’ll make you smart for those words before I’ve done with you !’

Adrian raised his eyebrows, and smiled ever so slightly. It appeared to him that the moment at which pecuniary compensation might be tendered with propriety was not far distant. ‘ And in what particular way, Susan,’ he asked, with the utmost suavity, ‘ do you propose to make me smart ?’

It had been no part of Susan’s plan to quarrel with the sinner whom she desired to reward according to his iniquities. ‘ You make me say things that I don’t want to say,’ she complained. ‘ Of course you know that I could give you trouble if I liked. I could write a few lines to your mother-in-law, Mrs. Irvine, or I could have five minutes’ conversation with your wife, or I could drop a hint to his lordship, who isn’t a pleasant man when he’s angered, they say. But why should I hurt you ? Hurting you wouldn’t make you love me again, and neither hurting you nor leaving you alone will get a kind word out of you, it seems.’

‘ I don’t want to seem unkind, Susan,’ answered Adrian ; ‘ but I must make you understand, if I can, that it is a mistake for us to exchange kind words—or any words. I don’t see what more I can say than that I am heartily sorry for having wronged you in the past—if I did wrong you.’

‘ *If* you did !’

‘ Well, let us say that I did. But what reparation can I make now ? I know it looks a little insulting to produce one’s purse ; still money *is* a useful thing, you know ; and I am sure I shall be only too glad——’

His somewhat halting speech was interrupted in a singular manner. Without the slightest warning, Susan abruptly flung her arms round his neck and held up her face close to his. ‘ Kiss me, Adrian,’ she whispered. ‘ Kiss me once !—for the sake of old days !’

What would the respected reader have done in this trying situation ? The humble writer is bound to confess that he would have done what Adrian did, and complied with the request which of all conceivable requests is the least easy to refuse. Adrian, then, bestowed a modest salute upon Susan’s forehead ; having done which, he endeavoured gently to disengage himself, but without success. Susan, regardless of the passers-by, clung to him with fond, inarticulate murmurs, and

he was beginning to think that he would have done better to hold her at arm's length, when he was released with a suddenness which threw him off his balance, and caused him to stagger backwards in an undignified manner ; while Susan, turning away from him, resumed the slow march which her access of tenderness had arrested.

It has just been said that she was regardless of the passers-by, and so the alarmed Adrian imagined that she was ; but in reality that was exactly what she was not. For five or ten minutes she had been keeping an anxious eye on the forms that flitted to and fro through the mist a few yards away, and when among these she discerned that of a tall, slight young lady whose gait seemed less purpose-like than her neighbours', she deemed it advisable to precipitate a crisis to which she had been leading up from the outset. There was thus a slight want of artistic finish in the way that Susan carried out her task, and this she regretted ; but when it is remembered that she had to reach a given point in her dialogue at a moment which could not be accurately determined beforehand, it will be allowed that she acquitted herself with a fair measure of credit. She had manœuvred so as to place Adrian with his back to the path ; looking over his shoulder, she saw the lady for whose benefit she was acting start, clasp her hands together nervously, stand still for a moment, and then hurry away into the gathering gloom ; after which, with a comfortable conviction that Mrs. Vidal had seen enough, she released Adrian in the manner described.

For it has to be confessed that the spectator of the scene was no other than Mrs. Vidal. Many people—most people, perhaps—will be disposed to think that it is a little beneath the dignity of a gentleman or a lady to act upon information conveyed anonymously ; if so, Clare's own opinion coincided with that of the majority. She made no excuses for herself, and none shall be made for her. She went to the Round Pond, as she had been told to do ; she walked slowly along the path, looking among the trees for the couple whom she expected to discover, and she saw—as she fully believed—Adrian fondly embracing Lady St. Austell. The improbability of Lady St. Austell's preferring to be embraced in the comparative publicity of Kensington Gardens, when she had a comfortable and private boudoir of her own in which to indulge in such pleasures, did not strike her ; nor would it have made very much difference if it had. For there could be no ques-

tion as to the fact that Adrian was the embracer whom his wife had seen ; and whether the embraced person were A or B was perhaps not a matter of primary importance. Clare, as she hastened homewards, felt that the limits of her endurance had been reached.

Meanwhile the culprit, little imagining into what a pitfall he had stepped by yielding to an amiable wish to make things pleasant, was rather surprised at the coolness which came over Susan's manner after her late demonstration.

'Well,' she remarked, in a curt, business-like tone, 'I won't keep you away from home any longer. Your wife may be wondering what has become of you, you know. We may as well say good-bye now.'

'Good-bye, Susan,' said Adrian, not unkindly. 'I can see that you think me rather hard-hearted ; but there's no help for that, I'm afraid. You won't ask me to meet you again in this way, will you ?'

'Probably not,' answered Susan drily.

'There really is no use in it, you see. And now I hope you'll accept a small present—I thought it possible that you might want a little help ;' and he deprecatingly produced four five-pound notes.

'Sir,' said Susan, 'your generosity to me I shall never forget. Hand over the money.'

He complied wonderingly. The woman's changes of tone were so frequent and abrupt that he began to think her intellect must be a trifle deranged ; and she perceived his suspicions with much amusement. Her natural histrionic talent being but slight, she had had considerable difficulty in playing her part, and the sense that she was now free to indulge in any conduct that might seem good to her filled her with exultation.

'Twenty pounds !' said she, examining the notes. 'Were you really so much afraid of me as that ? Now, a common person like me ought to consider herself rich with twenty pounds in her pocket, oughtn't she ?'

'I don't know,' answered Adrian, still somewhat puzzled.

'Oh yes ; it's wealth, I assure you. I have seen the day when twenty pence would have been welcome. With all this money, I can afford to treat myself to a luxury ; and a luxury I will have. What do you think I'm going to do with your kind present ?'

'I don't know,' said Adrian again.

'Why, I'm going to give the whole of it away in charity ; I am indeed. I'm going to give it to a deserving person. More than that, I'm going to add to it the sum of eight pound ten out of my own purse.'

She took her purse from her pocket as she spoke, and counted out the amount mentioned, which, together with the notes, she placed in Adrian's hands. 'There !' said she, 'you're the deserving person ; and oh, *what* a deserving person you are, to be sure ! Don't thank me, I beg ! It's a privilege to do anything for such a kind friend as you have been to me.'

'What on earth do you mean ?' asked Adrian.

'Only that I like to pay my debts ; and I have been owing you eight pound ten since the beginning of the year. I don't know whether we're quite quits yet ; but we're as near it as we shall get, I expect. Good-bye to you ; and before we part, let me tell you a secret. I'd rather die of hunger in a ditch than spend a sixpence of your money !'

Susan's face as she uttered these last words was not agreeable to look upon. She turned on her heel without waiting for a rejoinder ; and in truth Adrian had none ready.

CHAPTER XXVIII

INDISCRETION

DESPITE the efforts of the Nihilists, Fenians, and other well-meaning individuals, who have rendered the latter part of the nineteenth century so exciting a period to live in, the science of blowing people up is still far from having attained exactitude. In laying mines, or throwing glass balls filled with explosives, so many possibilities have to be taken into account, that it almost seems as if this method of improving society would in the end prove too disheartening to be persevered with. The Royal train passes in safety over the perilous spot, and it is only the Royal baggage, following half an hour later, that is converted into smithereens ; the tyrant whom it is desired to 'remove' passes along the street scathless, while some unoffending citizen makes a premature ascent to the skies. And so Miss Susan Bowman, who had conceived a really ingenious plan for wrecking Mr. Vidal's happiness, and had worked it

out with an attention to details which ought to have insured success, arrived at no more satisfactory result than the destruction of such remnants of happiness as were left to Mr. Vidal's wife.

Clare never for a moment thought of making such a scene as Susan's sanguine fancy had anticipated. She knew that angry words would not mend matters ; and even if she could have brought herself to confess that she had played the spy upon her husband, she would have shrunk from speaking of what she felt to be in some sort degrading to herself as well as to him. Her feeling was not so much one of indignation as of dull despair. She wanted to get away from Adrian : not to quarrel with him or to upbraid him, but simply to get away from him for a time. It vexed her not a little to discover that, in spite of all that he had done, she loved him still. Why should she go on caring for a man who no longer cared for her ? She could not tell why—she had always believed that she would hate him if he proved false to her ; but now that the blow had fallen, she found that she did not hate him. Those whose hearts are broken can hardly suffer much from wounded pride. Clare's pride asserted itself no farther than to make her resolve that her husband should never suspect the existence of the weakness which she could not overcome. 'If I could only get away !' she repeated to herself over and over again. She dwelt upon this thought until what had at first been no more than a vague wish became a definite and imperative craving ; and when Adrian, who had been dining out, came home that night, he found her, rather to his surprise, waiting for him in the drawing-room.

'Adrian,' she said at once, 'I want to go home for Christmas.'

'To go home ?' he echoed, in some consternation. 'Well, really, I don't quite see how we could manage that.'

'Not you ; of course you could not leave London. But there is no reason why I should not go alone. They would be glad to have me at home ; and I have not been feeling well lately.'

'Are you really not feeling well, Clare ?'

'I never feel quite well here,' she answered evasively ; 'I dare say I shall feel better in Cornwall. Have you any objection to my going ?'

Adrian hesitated. 'Won't they think it rather odd ?' he suggested.

'I don't think so. There is nothing extraordinary in my requiring a change of air and in your being too busy to go out of town. You need not be afraid about that,' she added, with a rather bitter smile; 'I am no more anxious than you are that they should know what terms we are on.'

An interval of silence was broken by a deep sigh from Adrian. 'Do you *like* being upon these terms, Clare?' he asked.

'I think they are the only terms possible for us,' she replied coldly. 'May I write to my mother, then?'

'Oh, by all means, if you wish it,' answered Adrian, whose temper, as we know, had already been tried that day, and who was beginning to think that it would have been no bad thing if Adam had been allowed to keep all his ribs. 'I shall not spend a very cheerful Christmas; but that, of course, is of no consequence. How long do you propose to make your visit?'

'I thought of a month; but I could come back sooner if I was wanted for anything here.' She added, after a moment, 'I think the servants understand their work pretty well now; but I will speak to the cook before I go, and make arrangements, so that you shall not be troubled about ordering dinner.'

'Oh, if you are going to be as much as a month away, I shall put the servants on board wages and take my meals at the club,' answered Adrian.

Clare felt a twinge of compunction. If it had been in her power to inflict some sharp mental suffering upon her husband, she would not, perhaps, have stayed her hand; but the idea of driving him out of doors to seek his dinner was repugnant to her. 'I am afraid that will be very inconvenient,' she murmured; 'it is such a long way to go.'

'No; I shall not find it so. I can always dress there in the evenings, and I rather like a walk before breakfast. Besides, I am not particularly fond of eating in absolute solitude.'

Adrian felt himself decidedly aggrieved; and this is always a consolatory sensation. He did not press his wife for reasons for her desertion of him, nor did she volunteer any. It was arranged that she should start for Cardrew in the second week of December, and the prospect of a speedy release enabled her to bear herself with tolerable composure during the interim.

The day fixed upon for her departure was drawing nigh, when she was made the recipient of an honour as unexpected

as it was flattering. Lord St. Austell, who was at one time a great frequenter of ladies' drawing-rooms, has of late years ceased to seek relaxation in that particular field, and is now more often to be seen behind the plate-glass window of his club towards five o'clock in the afternoon than beside the tea-tables of his fair friends. Nevertheless, it was at that hour on a dim December day that his brougham stopped at the door of a certain modest mansion in Alexandra Gardens, and immediately afterwards he was shown into the presence of our astonished heroine, his eye-glass in his eye, a smart little bouquet in his button-hole, and his teeth agreeably conspicuous.

'And how is Mrs. Vidal?' inquired his lordship pleasantly, holding out a lavender-kidded hand. It is hard for even the most juvenile of old gentlemen to keep quite abreast of the customs of the day, and Lord St. Austell has never been able to divorce himself from his lavender kid gloves.

'I have come,' he continued, 'to beg for a cup of tea.' And thereupon he seated himself beside Clare's work-table, and contemplated her across it with that dreadful grinning smile of his, in which his eyes did not participate.

Upon the face of it, there is no reason at all why an elderly acquaintance should not drop in towards the close of the afternoon and ask for a cup of tea; but Clare would hardly have been more taken aback if the Czar of all the Russias had suddenly presented himself with the same modest request. She displayed a good deal of confusion, thereby delighting her visitor, who thought modesty a very becoming thing in a young woman.

'I did not know you were in London,' she remarked, saying the first thing that came into her head.

'I only arrived from Paris yesterday; but Lady St. Austell has been here for some weeks. Of course, she has called upon you. No? I am quite ashamed—I blush for her. But she is so young and thoughtless that she often forgets her duties, I am sorry to say. She has not forgotten Mr. Vidal, though; for I left him in Grosvenor Square half an hour ago. But perhaps I ought not to have mentioned that; perhaps he doesn't always tell you what house he is bound for when he goes out. I don't mind confessing that I didn't tell Lady St. Austell I was coming here.'

'Do you take cream and sugar?' asked Clare, not much relishing this style of conversation.

'Anything that you are kind enough to give me, my dear Mrs. Vidal ; senna would taste sweet, coming from your hand. I was saying that I had seen Mr. Vidal at my house. I left a positive mob there—my son amongst the rest. I don't know whether you ever met my son.'

Clare said she had not had that pleasure.

'Ah, well, you haven't missed much. Blaise is a very good fellow, but he is too good for poor sinners like me. He is many years older than I am, and he depresses me so with his solemn ways that I generally slip out of the house as soon as he enters it. He means to stay with us for another week, I am told. Perhaps you will allow me to take refuge with you sometimes during this period of affliction.'

'I should be most happy,' answered Clare, using that conventional phrase as insincerely as it has ever been uttered, 'but I am going down to Cornwall the day after tomorrow.'

Lord St. Austell fell back in his chair with an exaggerated show of consternation. 'Going down to Cornwall ! Oh, Mrs. Vidal, how can you have the cruelty to deal such knock-down blows with a smiling face ? Why go down to the gales and rains of Cornwall ? Why not stay in London and console the humblest of your slaves ? *Do stay !*' He bent insinuatingly over the table, and stretched out his hand to grasp that of his hostess, which, however, he missed, owing to its abrupt withdrawal.

Clare shrank back affrighted from those grinning jaws, those wicked old gleaming eyes. It must be admitted that Lord St. Austell's method of making love was somewhat wolfish ; but he had met with so many a tender lambkin willing to jump down his throat, that he had not unnaturally learnt to make advances more bold than wary. Nevertheless, he knew better than to follow up one false step by another ; so, pushing back his chair, he fell to discoursing about Paris and the last new play at the Comédie Française in a pleasant, fatherly sort of way, until she became reassured, and began to think that perhaps he was not such a bad old man after all. Having created this favourable impression, he proceeded forthwith to obliterate it.

'I suppose,' said he, 'that when you are in Paris you spend a good deal of your time in flattening your nose against the jewellers' windows. All ladies do. So do I, sometimes. I saw this,' he continued, opening a small velvet case, which he

took from his breast-pocket, ‘in the Rue de la Paix, and it rather took my fancy.’

Clare examined the diamond pendant handed over to her for inspection. ‘It is lovely,’ she said.

‘So glad it pleases you, because I was thinking of you when I bought it. Will you accept it, dear Mrs. Vidal?’

‘Oh no, thank you!’ exclaimed Clare, dropping the case and drawing back. ‘I never accept presents of jewellery.’

‘Don’t you think,’ asked Lord St. Austell sweetly—‘excuse my saying so; but don’t you think that is a little bit prudish of you?’

‘Prudishness has nothing to do with it,’ replied Clare, the colour mounting into her cheeks; ‘I don’t care to receive presents from strangers, that is all.’

‘But I,’ observed Lord St. Austell imperturbably, ‘am not a stranger. Added to which, I really think, taking everything into consideration, I may claim certain privileges.’

‘Do you mean on account of your advanced age?’ asked Clare, who understood his insinuation, and was made so angry by it that all her timidity left her. ‘No doubt that is quite sufficient to absolve me of any prudishness if I refuse to take a valuable present from you; still, I would rather not have it, thank you.’

Lord St. Austell thought that a little display of temper made pretty Mrs. Vidal look prettier than ever. It was without any acerbity that he replied, ‘I was not alluding to my age; only to the fact that I am my wife’s husband, while you are your husband’s wife. It seems to me that, as we are both so accommodating, we are entitled to treat ourselves to little equivalents every now and then. At the same time I should be very sorry to force my poor trinket upon you against your will. Let us talk about something else.’

But Clare did not want to talk about anything else. Her only wish was to get rid of this odious old satyr as soon as possible, and she made that wish so plain that he was presently compelled to take his leave. He squeezed her hand affectionately at parting, and said, ‘As you are going away, Mrs. Vidal, I shall go too. There will be nothing to stay in London for now; but we shall meet again before the spring, I trust, and in the meantime I shall be always thinking about you.’

To this speech Clare listened in chilling silence; but when her venerable persecutor had left her, she sat down and began

to cry softly. This, then, was the sort of life that she was destined to lead henceforth ; and it was to insults such as these that women of the world were expected to submit without taking offence ; and it was in the society of such people as the St. Austells that Adrian delighted !

Had she been able to read the thoughts that were passing through Adrian's mind at the same moment, she would have discovered that he did not always find Lady St. Austell's society delightful. On entering her drawing-room that afternoon he had found a large assemblage of visitors already seated there, and before them all she had smiled upon him, languished at him, and whispered to him, in a way that caused them to exchange significant glances and made him very uncomfortable. He did not want to be thus distinguished ; he did not want people to say—as he knew they would say—that he was the latest of this capricious lady's admirers ; and he did his best to check her advances. In this attempt he failed completely. Lady St. Austell had three good reasons for conducting herself as she was doing. Firstly, flirtation was as the breath of her nostrils to her ; secondly, she wished to get rid of her visitors, who bored her ; thirdly and lastly, it gave her much pleasure to shock her step-son, Lord Blaise, whom she could not endure, and who was now standing upon the hearth-rug, looking down upon her with astonishment and disgust. So she continued to whisper soft nothings to Adrian, and the visitors departed one by one, and Lord Blaise looked more and more displeased every minute.

There was a saying to the effect that the Earls of St. Austell were alternately rips and prigs, and that a black-haired earl was invariably succeeded by a red-headed one. Perhaps each heir-apparent, on surveying himself in the glass, may have felt that it was hopeless to struggle against his manifest destiny, and so may have helped to perpetuate the tradition. The father of the present holder of the title had been an eminently respectable old person who had lived well within his income, and had collected butterflies ; his son, who was now something more than middle-aged, and whose caroty locks were streaked with grey, had once been described by the leader of his party as the most conscientious and the dullest man in England. When Lord Blaise rose in the House of Commons there was a general stampede. No one had ever been found who could listen to him for five minutes without falling into profound slumber, and the news-

papers never thought of reporting him at length. This did not prevent him from plodding on with his carefully prepared speeches from the exordium to the bitter end ; nor had it kept him out of office. He had been Under-Secretary for various departments, and had distinguished himself by the patience with which he submitted to be questioned, and by the extraordinary prolixity of his replies. His party was at present in opposition ; and this was a source of grief to him, for he loved the labour of going into details, and it was not always easy to obtain a hearing when, after much research, he had discovered some inaccuracy in the statements of his successor. In private life he had not a great many friends, although he was just, benevolent, and perfectly straightforward in all his words and ways. It is permissible to a man to be straightforward, if only he will be so in a pleasant manner ; but poor Lord Blaise's manner was not pleasant, and this made his straightforwardness unwelcome to most people.

His step-mother, who had had to listen to more than one remonstrance from his lips, and had found it equally impossible to conciliate and to break with him, derived some satisfaction from outraging his notions of propriety ; and if she could have induced Adrian to respond a little more warmly now to the encouragement vouchsafed to him, she would not have felt that her afternoon had been wholly barren of amusement. When the last of her guests had gone away, she seated herself on an ottoman beside the young author, and said :

‘Now we can talk in peace. You need not mind Lord Blaise ; he is mounting guard over us in the interests of morality, and cart-ropes would not drag him out of the room.’

Lord Blaise cleared his voice, thrust his hands into his pockets, and leant back against the mantelpiece. It always took him some little time to think of a reply, and Lady St. Austell went on, without waiting for him, ‘He may safely be treated as a nonentity. The only language that he speaks is the language of Hansard and blue books, and he won’t understand more than a word here and there of what we say.’

‘We have no secrets to talk about, that I am aware of,’ remarked Adrian.

‘How cautious you are ! It really is rather hard that one can never count upon ten undisturbed minutes in one’s

own house. The end of it will be that I shall have to go to yours. Will you admit me, if I knock at your door ?'

'Of course we should be delighted, Lady St. Austell,' answered Adrian; 'but unluckily my wife is going down to the country the day after to-morrow.'

'You don't say so ! Then the day after to-morrow you may expect to see me. She will leave in the morning, I suppose ?'

'Julia,' broke in Lord Blaise, in a harsh voice, 'when do you leave town ?'

'Really I don't know ; I haven't made up my mind yet. If it didn't sound inhospitable, I would ask when *you* mean to go.'

'Your movements,' replied Lord Blaise, 'need not be in any way affected by mine. I require nothing more than a bedroom, and I can easily remain on here after you move, if necessary. As a matter of fact, I believe that I shall finish the business that I have to attend to in about three days' time.'

'In that case you may count upon being cheered by my company throughout your stay. But to return to what I was saying,' she added, addressing Adrian, 'I really should enjoy above all things paying you a visit. May I ?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Adrian, with a somewhat ungracious air.

'Very well ; that is settled. The day after to-morrow, then, about three o'clock in the afternoon. I shall come early, so as to have a good long time, and I shall explore the recesses of your study, and sit in the historical chair in which you meditate upon your writings. Perhaps I may write a few words, as a memento of my visit, with the historical pen. What fun it will be !'

Lord Blaise frowned heavily at Vidal ; but as the latter did not speak, he felt bound to utter a protest. 'Are you aware, Julia,' he asked, 'that in acting as you propose you will risk nothing less than the loss of your character ?'

'Exactly so,' agreed Lady St. Austell ; 'that is the amusing part of it. I have long wished to do something innocent and at the same time truly shocking ; and this is an opportunity which may not recur. There will be very little risk about my visit to Mr. Vidal's house ; because only three people will know of it, and they will all hold their tongues upon the subject, I think. I shall not tell for obvious reasons ;

Mr. Vidal will not tell because he is a gentleman. About you I am not quite so sure ; but after all it is only fair to you to say that you are not an absolute idiot.'

'In view of the very serious nature of the case,' said Lord Blaise, not at all mollified by this passing tribute to his intellectual powers, 'I must claim the right of exercising my own judgment as to the line of action which it may be advisable for me to adopt.' And with that he marched out of the room.

Lady St. Austell burst into a fit of laughter. 'Now, would you,' she asked—'*would* you have believed it possible that Lord St. Austell could have such a son as that ?'

'I certainly think you were paying him rather too high a compliment when you said that he was not an idiot,' replied Adrian, who was a good deal put out. 'I should have thought any one with a grain of intelligence would have understood that you were not serious in proposing to go to my house.'

'What !—not serious ? Indeed, I never was more serious in my life. If anything in this world is certain, it is certain that I shall be in Alexandra Gardens the day after to-morrow as the clock strikes three.'

'Really I think you had better not.'

'How disagreeable you are !' cried Lady St. Austell petulantly. 'You never do anything that I want you to do ! Why should you grudge me a little harmless amusement ? It can't hurt *you*, whatever happens.'

Adrian was not quite so sure of that ; but he only said, 'It was of you that I was thinking.'

'Then pray don't disturb yourself on my account any longer. If I choose to be imprudent for once in a way, that is my affair. One thing I can promise you : if you won't allow me into your house, you shall not be allowed into mine again.'

A more alarming form of menace might have been discovered ; but such as it was, it served its purpose. Adrian yielded, and presently took his leave, inwardly resolving to give Lady St. Austell no second pretext for compromising herself and him.

Late that night, as Lord St. Austell was sitting in the smoking-room of his club, he was surprised to see his son approaching him with the aspect of one who has a purpose in hand.

'Hullo, Blaise !' said he, 'what are you doing abroad at

this hour? I thought your nurse always put you to bed and tucked you up at ten sharp during the recess.'

'I want to say a word or two to you about Julia,' began Lord Blaise, disregarding this facetious greeting. 'She will get herself into serious trouble if she goes on as she is doing. I suppose you and she understand each other, and you apparently see no objection to a good deal that I should think highly undesirable in my wife; but you can hardly wish her to be the heroine of an open scandal, and—'

'Blaise,' interrupted Lord St. Austell, fixing a steady stare upon his heir-apparent, 'did you ever hear how it was that an ancestor of ours came very near having his head cut off in the reign of James II. ?'

'He was suspected of being implicated in Monmouth's rebellion. The evidence was of the flimsiest description, and I believe that nothing whatever was proved against him, beyond a few imprudent speeches.'

'Just so. He made some imprudent speeches, and meddled with what didn't concern him. I wouldn't follow his example if I were you.'

'Nobdy can cut my head off,' remarked Lord Blaise.

'No; but somebody can cut you out of the whole of the Hertfordshire estates, and of a very considerable amount of personal property. Believe me, you had better stick to politics, and leave social affairs to meaner intellects.'

'I am sorry if my remarks offend you,' said Lord Blaise, 'but your displeasure will not prevent me from telling you that I heard Julia make an appointment this afternoon to visit a certain Mr. Vidal at his house the day after to-morrow, having previously ascertained that his wife would be absent from home on that day.'

Lord St. Austell chuckled, and seemed much amused. 'The deuce she did!' cried he. 'This is great sport. My dear Blaise, you did well to impart this distressing news to me, and I will not disinherit you so long as you continue to be honest and virtuous. May I ask whether you heard any hour fixed for the appointment that you speak of?'

'Yes; she mentioned three o'clock.'

'Thank you very much. Now I won't keep you out of bed any longer. I am sure that the family honour is safe in your keeping, and that you won't let anybody else into the secret which you have so properly confided to me. Good night.'

CHAPTER XXIX

AN UNWELCOME GUEST

WHEN Adrian had taken Clare's ticket for Polruth, had put her into the train, and had recommended her to the care of the guard, he walked away sadly enough. The day was damp, raw, and dismal, and he shuddered as he thought of the empty house whither he was returning—that empty house in which he was presently to have the honour of receiving Lady St. Austell. He shuddered a little at the thought of Lady St. Austell too, and then could not repress a smile at the irony of the situation. If Clare only knew who was going to spend the afternoon in her drawing-room! Happily, the Flying Dutchman would be hurrying her through Devonshire by that time, and it was in the last degree unlikely that she would ever hear of an escapade which it was to Lady St. Austell's interest to keep secret. But he ceased to smile when he remembered that equal reliance could hardly be placed upon the discretion of the servants. Doubtless the servants knew very well that there was a split between their master and mistress; doubtless also they were eager to arrive at its origin, and would draw their own conclusions from so significant a circumstance as the arrival of a lady at the house within a few hours of Mrs. Vidal's leaving it. After Adrian had reached home, he began to hope that this aspect of the case might have presented itself to Lady St. Austell as well as to himself, and that calmer reflection would induce her to abandon her rash purpose.

But this hope was doomed to disappointment. Punctually at three o'clock her carriage dashed up to the door, and directly afterwards she swept into the drawing-room with an air of triumph.

'You see I have kept my word,' she said.

'I feel very proud,' answered Adrian. 'I will ring and order some tea.'

'Oh, not yet, thank you,' laughed Lady St. Austell; 'I have only just finished luncheon. Now confess the truth: you never believed that I should come, did you?'

'The proof that I did is that I am here,' Adrian replied. 'I don't think I have ever been at home at this hour before.'

'Well, at any rate, you hoped I shouldn't come, and at this moment you are wishing with all your heart that I hadn't. Strictly between ourselves, I may tell you that I had quite made up my mind this morning not to come ; but when Blaise walked in to luncheon with a face as long as Cromwell Road, and asked me what I was going to do in the afternoon, I couldn't resist the temptation of replying, "I thought I told you that I was going to see Mr. Vidal." And so here I am. If you could manage to look a little less awkward and uncomfortable, it would set me more at my ease.'

Adrian endeavoured to obey this injunction. It was some relief to him to find that Lady St. Austell was not in one of her sentimental moods. 'What shall I do to amuse you ?' he asked cheerfully.

'I don't think I need call upon you to exert yourself yet ; just at present the sensation of being here is sufficiently amusing in itself. So your wife has gone home, has she ?'

'Yes. I don't know whether you care for Japanese china ; but I have some Satsuma in the next room, which my father-in-law got for me, and which is rather good, I believe. Would you like to see it ?'

'Presently. I was going to ask you about your wife. Why has she gone off like this ?'

'She wants to see her people.'

'That is reassuring. I was afraid I might be the innocent cause of her flight.'

'She does not even know that you are in London,' said Adrian, with a touch of impatience.

'I wouldn't be so sure of that if I were you. She knows more than you think for, perhaps : people's wives generally do. And I can tell you something about her that you don't know. She has made a conquest.'

'Indeed ?'

'Yes ; indeed. And who, of all people in the world, should her admirer be but my husband ! Isn't it funny ? It is as if we four had sat down to a rubber of whist ; only we are all rather bad players, because we can't find out what our partners have in their hands. I don't know when I have been more tickled than when I heard of Lord St. Austell's last infatuation. The second coachman told his valet, who told my maid, who told me, that he paid Mrs. Vidal a visit of over an hour the other day.'

A more unwelcome piece of intelligence could hardly have

been conveyed to Adrian, who now began to understand why Clare had avoided speaking to him or looking at him during the last two days. ‘This is very flattering,’ he remarked grimly.

‘Well, not so *very*; because Lord St. Austell is anything but particular, and I doubt whether he ever was what I should call really in love in his life. It is great fun, though.’

‘It does not appear so to me,’ said Adrian; ‘but possibly my appreciation of the ludicrous may be defective.’

Lady St. Austell stared at him and laughed. ‘How glum you look!’ she exclaimed. ‘Are you going to assume the part of a jealous husband? That would be perfect! It would then only remain for Lord St. Austell to honour me in the same way—he does so sometimes—and the whole business would become so delightfully involved that we should none of us know exactly what was the matter. What I should like would be to see Lord St. Austell and Mrs. Vidal walk into the room now.’

‘Heaven forbid!’ ejaculated Adrian.

‘Heaven is not likely to work miracles for our benefit; but supposing that it were possible for those two to appear suddenly, what a thrilling scene we should have! You must admit that it would be thrilling.’

‘I dare say it would,’ answered Adrian; ‘but I don’t think I like being thrilled. Won’t you come and look at my china, and leave the absent to look after themselves?’

Inwardly he was wondering how much longer Lady St. Austell meant to stay. He had found it pleasant enough to visit her in Grosvenor Square, and to be sympathised with and petted by her; but it was quite another thing to have her sitting in his own drawing-room, suggesting horrible catastrophes, and affecting that recklessness of tone which is so extremely repulsive in a woman of whom you do not happen to be enamoured. He heartily wished that he had had the strength of mind to tell her plainly that he must decline to receive her during his wife’s absence.

As, however, the mischief was done now, and could not be undone, he wisely resolved to make the best of things, and not to offend a lady who, good-natured though she was, did not readily pardon those who remained insensible to her charms.

CHAPTER XXX

AN UNLUCKY DAY

CLARE, meanwhile, had been making acquaintance with the vicissitudes of travel. When the train reached Swindon, it became evident that something had gone wrong. There was more than the usual bustle going on upon the platform ; the railway officials were clustered together in a group, and the passengers were excitedly telling one another—as passengers always do when an unexpected delay occurs—that there had been a frightful accident and appalling loss of life. Clare could get no coherent information out of her fellow-travellers ; but presently the guard into whose charge Adrian had committed her came up, and asked, ‘Was you the lady as booked for St. Columb Road, m’m ?’

Clare said, ‘Yes ; has there been an accident ?’

‘Not to say an accident, m’m ; but there’s been a bit of a landslip somewheres down the line, and I doubt they won’t get it clear afore night. You see, if you was going no further than Plymouth, m’m, we might be able to get you there later ; but as ‘tis, I don’t see no chance for you.’

‘What am I to do, then ?’ asked Clare in dismay.

‘Well, m’m, if you arst me, I should say you was best go back to London. There’s the up express going out in five minutes, as ’ll get you to Paddington at 2.45, and the company ’ll pass you down to-morrow with the same ticket.’

There did not seem to be much choice about the matter. Clare despatched a telegram to her father, and was presently speeding towards the metropolis again in the company of several angry individuals, who, like herself, had been compelled to abandon their journey, and who perhaps had less reason for railing at their luck than she had. It is always a disagreeable thing to have to return after saying good-bye ; but in Clare’s case this necessity was more than usually painful. The only grain of comfort that she could take to herself, as she was driven away from the Paddington station, was the thought that she certainly would not find Adrian at home on her return. He would, of course, dine at his club, and the chances were that she would not see him until the following morning ; so that there would be no need for a long interview

between them before they parted again. That she herself would have to do without dinner was not a prospect that distressed her ; for she had no appetite, and, indeed, cared little about dinner at the best of times.

She was becoming more cheerful, when an incident occurred which convinced her that this was indeed an unlucky day. Near the Albert Hall her hansom was brought to a standstill, and suddenly, to her horror, a too familiar voice exclaimed, ‘Mrs. Vidal !—is it possible ? Have you relented at the last moment, and decided not to bereave us yet awhile ?’

Lord St. Austell’s nose and teeth and eye-glass appeared before Clare’s unwilling eyes, like a nightmare, out of the murky atmosphere. ‘I was on my way to your house,’ he continued. ‘Going to call on your husband, you know ; I quite forgot to leave a card for him the other day. Allow me——’ And with an agility very creditable in one of his years, Lord St. Austell hopped into the hansom and seated himself beside his victim. ‘Now we will proceed together,’ said he. ‘I call this a most auspicious meeting.’

It certainly seemed to give him a great deal of pleasure. His habitual grin expressed real delight this time, and presently he fell back and went off into a fit of silent laughter which rather alarmed his companion, who could not understand why he should be so merry.

In truth, the days which are unlucky for some must needs be lucky for others, and impartial Fate, while dealing roughly with a few of our friends upon this occasion, had smiled upon Lord St. Austell. His lordship had indeed set out from home with well-grounded anticipations of enjoyment ; but this was far more than he had hoped for. His original plan of walking to Alexandra Gardens, asking for Mr. Vidal, and surprising his wife in a situation which even she would admit to be equivocal, sank into insignificance by comparison with the dramatic episode which he now had it in his power to create ; and so enchanted was he at the prospect of the coming joke that he had much ado to restrain himself from ruining it by taking Mrs. Vidal into his confidence. He listened inattentively to her account of the mishap which had caused her return, and only began to be amused when she assured him earnestly that he would not find her husband at home.

‘Good-bye, Lord St. Austell,’ she said, as she stepped nimbly out on to the pavement ; ‘I won’t ask you to come in.’

'How cruel you are to me, Mrs. Vidal!' exclaimed the old gentleman reproachfully. 'But perhaps I shall be allowed into the house, though you won't invite me. I came here to call on your husband, you know.'

'It really is not worth while to get out and ask for him,' said Clare. 'He is quite certain to be at his club.'

Lord St. Austell, however, had already rung the bell; and great was the astonishment of the parlourmaid on witnessing the return of her mistress, thus escorted. Had this young woman been possessed of presence of mind or consideration for the feelings of others, she would no doubt have mentioned that Adrian was not alone; but presumably she lacked these gifts, and even ordinary good manners into the bargain; for all that she did was to open her eyes very wide and ejaculate, 'Lord bless me, mum! Mr. Vidal will be surprised!' After which she tripped upstairs to open the drawing-room door.

A careful comparison of the time required to drive from Paddington to Alexandra Gardens with that occupied by the conversation between Adrian and his visitor, recorded in the last chapter, will show that the new-comers reached the foot of the staircase very shortly after Lady St. Austell had so rashly expressed a wish for their appearance. Neither she nor Adrian had heard the door-bell ring; but they were startled simultaneously by the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and exchanged glances of dismay.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Lady St. Austell, 'there's somebody coming! What shall I do?'

There was no time for anything. The words were barely out of her mouth when the door was flung open, admitting Lord St. Austell and Mrs. Vidal; and the tableau which ensued was doubtless appreciated to the full by the only one of the four persons concerned therein who was in a condition of mind to take note of its various features.

Adrian started up. His heart died within him, and a chilly conviction crept over him that he was in a worse scrape now than he had ever been in before. Lady St. Austell began to laugh; but when she met her husband's steady, malignant gaze, she ceased suddenly and caught her breath. What would he do to her? She had always been frightened of him, and she knew that he was not the man to show mercy for the sake of mercy. Clare stopped short on the threshold, feeling dazed and sick, as if she had received a physical blow. The walls seemed to be turning round her, a mist rose before her eyes,

and she would very likely have fainted had she not felt the touch of Lord St. Austell's arm, which was extended to catch her. From that contact she shrank away, making a strong effort to command herself, and stood, grasping the back of a chair with one hand, and looking with a sort of fascination at Adrian's face, which was as white as her own. It was Lord St. Austell's high-pitched, sarcastic voice that broke the silence.

'Why don't you have a screen in your drawing-room, Mr. Vidal? I thought everybody had Japanese screens nowadays. It is a pity you forgot that useful article when you were furnishing, because, if you had only had it, we might have done the scene from "The School for Scandal" to perfection. Lady St. Austell would have been Lady Teazle; you would have been Joseph Surface; I should have been Sir Peter; and Mrs. Vidal—well, there the cast breaks down a little; but perhaps I might have managed Charles Surface's laugh myself. To tell the truth, I am not sure that I am particularly well fitted to play Sir Peter's part; but I so far resemble him that I shall be glad to hear anything that you may have to say for yourself, Mr. Vidal.'

'Is this a preconcerted plot?' broke out Adrian hoarsely. In truth, he hardly knew what he was saying.

'My dear sir, you must permit me to remark that that is neither a very polite nor a very intelligent question. Ladies do not, as a rule, preconcert plots of which the last act takes place in the Divorce Court. May I inquire again whether you have anything to say for yourself?'

'Nothing to you,' returned Adrian, finding a foolish comfort in defying somebody.

Lord St. Austell raised his eyebrows. 'There was a time,' he observed—'I am sorry to say that I am old enough to have more than one personal reminiscence connected with it—when, after such an answer as that, further words would have been superfluous. Indeed, I suppose that, whatever your answer had been, neither you nor I could have avoided a hostile encounter fifty years ago; and I may add that it is no bad thing for you that the century is so far advanced, for I should undoubtedly have killed you, if we had fought fifty years ago. Nowadays, as you are aware, a different mode of procedure is customary. We simply take Sir James Hannen and the public into our confidence, and all is amicably arranged, without loss of life.'

'Sydney!' gasped Lady St. Austell, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of alarm, 'you don't mean what you say—you can't mean it! You know I never did anything wrong in my life!'

Lord St. Austell focussed his eye-glass on his wife, and surveyed her with interest. 'I am not prepared,' he answered, 'to make quite so startling an assertion as that; but I will go so far as to say that never have I beheld a more innocent-looking person. Innocence is written upon every line of your countenance, my love—or at least it would be written there, if your countenance possessed any lines. You are agitated; but not more so than the circumstances warrant. You are indignant; but that is only what an innocent person ought to be; and I observe with pleasure that the colour has not forsaken your face.'

Poor Lady St. Austell was ghastly. The fixed spots of pink upon her cheek-bones, which were hardly distinguishable at ordinary times from the natural bloom of youth, contrasted strangely with the greenish-yellow tinge of the skin around them. There was a pause, during which Clare quietly left the room; and then Adrian bethought himself that he had taken a somewhat unwise course in refusing to give the explanation asked of him.

'Perhaps,' said he, 'I had better tell the plain truth about this unfortunate business. Lady St. Austell called here this afternoon out of sheer—what shall I say?—bravado. She wanted, I believe, to shock Lord Blaise, who had annoyed her by some things that he said. It is rather hard lines upon me, seeing that I did my best to dissuade her from coming, and that I shall have to suffer for my folly in giving way; but I see no reason why she should not get off scot-free.'

'There *is* no reason,' cried the unhappy lady, who was thinking only of her own predicament, and did not notice the somewhat ungracious manner in which she was exculpated. 'It all happened just as Mr. Vidal says. I never meant the slightest harm, and I know it is only that spiteful, dishonourable, red-headed wretch who has caused all this trouble!' And here, being overcome by the poignancy of her remorse, she burst into a flood of tears.

Lord St. Austell laughed—not ill-naturedly. 'Be comforted,' said he; 'I am not going to petition for a divorce. I have fifty good reasons for refraining from doing so, amongst which, perhaps, the most excellent is that I shouldn't get one.'

There is no evidence to convict you of anything worse than of being a singularly foolish woman ; and it is hardly necessary to put the law in motion in order to arrive at a conviction of that. Excuse my plain language.'

With such a load of apprehension lifted from her mind, Lady St. Austell would have forgiven anything. She promptly dried her eyes, which began to sparkle again ; and her husband went on.

' May I advise you both not to attempt this sort of thing again ? People who can't command their nerves ought not to court risk. I myself have often been far more awkwardly situated than you were just now, and I have always extricated myself without difficulty ; but then I'm not nervous. Well, Mr. Vidal, the play is over now, and it only remains for us to bid you good-bye and go home. Please present my compliments to Mrs. Vidal, who I am sorry to see has left us, and tell her that I trust she will show as forgiving a spirit as I have done.'

When Adrian was left alone, he sat down, and for the space of five minutes made use of every strong expression that he could think of, without thereby succeeding in putting much additional heart into himself. What he was to say to Clare he had no idea ; but it was certain that he must say something to her, and presently he followed her to her bedroom, screwing up his courage as best he could to face the inevitable.

He found the door locked, and she only opened it a couple of inches to give him a brief account of the misadventure which had caused her return ; after which she begged that she might be left undisturbed until the next morning.

' Won't you let me tell you how all this has come to pass ? ' pleaded Adrian humbly.

But she answered, ' To-morrow morning, if you wish—not now.'

And in the morning he found her as impracticable as he had feared that she would be. He confessed the whole truth, admitting that he had done wrong in suppressing the fact that Lady St. Austell had been for some weeks in London, but declaring that his motives had not been bad motives, and asseverating with a fervour which ought to have been convincing that he had never entertained any feeling for that lady that was not of a mildly friendly character. But after what Clare had witnessed in Kensington Gardens such protestations

could only disgust her. She listened to him impassively for a time, and then interrupted him with,—

‘I would rather hear no more about it, please. I don’t wish to refer to the subject again ; nor, I should think, do you.’

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STING OF THE SCORPION

ONE morning in January, Adrian, after breakfasting at his club, thought it would be a good thing to stroll down to the office of the *Anglo-Saxon*. It was some considerable time since he had seen the editor of that hybrid publication, and amongst the letters which lay beside his plate was one from Pilkington, in which he was asked to ‘look in some day between eleven and twelve o’clock.’ Another of his letters was from Clare, who had now been several weeks absent, and whose return had not yet been spoken of. It cannot be said that Adrian wished for her return. He had succeeded in making himself thoroughly angry with her, and in exonerating himself from all blame. At the bottom of his heart there may still have lurked some belief that things would come right in the long run ; but he said to himself repeatedly that he had no such hope, and that if she was determined to make life a burden for them both, it was certainly better that they should remain apart. As Clare, starting from other premisses, had arrived at a similar conclusion, there seemed little likelihood that the husband and wife would meet again until they found it advisable to quiet the suspicions of their relatives. A tacit agreement that the latter consideration was of some importance caused them to write to each other twice a week ; and the difficulty of composing the letter thus exchanged may perhaps be regarded as part of the penance which they both undoubtedly deserved.

Some people, as we know, have to do penance for being worse than their neighbours, others for being better, and some only for being a little too prominently before their neighbours’ eyes. It was in the last capacity that Adrian had begun rather to regret his connection with the *Anglo-Saxon*. Pilkington’s crotchet of making his contributors sign their articles had not worked well. A man may submit to adverse criticism

If his critic be personally unknown to him, or even if the identity of the critic be only shrewdly guessed at; but when Tom, Dick, or Harry openly proclaims himself as a Minos sitting in judgment upon his fellows, the matter assumes quite another complexion. In such a case poor Minos can hardly hope to give satisfaction. His capacity, unprotected by the editorial 'we' in which so much virtue lies, is pretty sure to be called in question; it will be asked what business he has to thrust his personal predilections and prejudices down people's throats, and his praise will be little less resented than his blame.

'Am I, who have been before the public for twenty years, to be patronised by a whipper-snapper who only learnt to write his own language the other day?' calls out Jones, the eminent novelist. 'Who the deuce cares whether he thinks me "upon the whole the most skilful portrayer of modern English life that we have among us" or not? "Upon the whole" is good. Of course we understand who runs me close and might be said to surpass me, if modesty didn't close his lips.'

Thus Adrian had made enemies for himself; and to make enemies was what he could not endure. Moreover, he had been distressed latterly by comments upon the management of the *Anglo-Saxon* which had reached his ears. The editorial disclaimer which had been wrung from Pilkington by Lady St. Austell, and which has been quoted already, had given rise to a good deal of disrespectful mirth; nor was this the only instance in which that gentleman had thought it necessary to inform his readers that, though he sat upon the box, he did not drive the coach. The common belief is that even the most perfectly trained of teams requires to be driven by somebody, and Pilkington had been at some pains to point out that his team was not trained at all. Thus the public had fallen into the disastrous habit of laughing at him and his queer paper; and Adrian feared without having any precise information upon the point -that the circulation of the latter was not what could be wished. He had as yet received no return for the two thousand pounds which he had so reluctantly invested in it, although he had supposed that the dividends would have been payable half-yearly. Fifty per cent. would have been extremely welcome to him, and so, indeed, would twenty-five. Ten would not have been amiss. Of late his expectations had become so modest that he had more than

once muttered to himself that he would be very glad to see his two thousand back, without a penny in respect of interest.

Revolving all these things in his mind, Adrian walked slowly towards the Strand, where the offices of the *Anglo-Saxon* were situated. These were not particularly commodious ; but the editor's room had been furnished with rather more regard to elegance than is generally bestowed upon such apartments, in deference to the fastidious tastes of its present occupant—who, by the way, was seldom to be seen in it.

Pilkington, who was seated before a broad writing-table, swung round in his chair, which turned on a pivot, and held out his hand to Adrian with that air of kindly patronage which was all his own. ‘How do you do, Vidal ?’ he said. ‘I am glad to see you again.’

‘And I am very glad to see you,’ returned Adrian. ‘I rather wanted to ask you about one or two things connected with the paper. You have been a long time out of town.’

‘I should have been a good deal longer out of town if I could have consulted my own wishes ; but all this’—and he waved his hand towards the table, which was covered with MSS. and proofs—‘requires looking into every now and then. I find it a great drag upon me.’

It occurred to Adrian that Pilkington probably earned his salary with as little labour as any man living ; but he said, ‘I suppose you must.’

‘So much so that lately I have sometimes thought that it might be better to give it up.’

‘I trust you won’t do that,’ said Adrian quickly. ‘The whole thing would go to pieces if you withdrew.’

‘Even so, the world would continue to revolve upon its own axis much as usual, I dare say. But I am not sure that my retirement from the editorship would have so bad an effect upon the paper as you are kind enough to assume. Many people seem to think that Mr. Larkins would replace me very efficiently.’

Mr. Larkins was the sub-editor—an alert, business-like man, not quite a gentleman, who had won his spurs in journalism some years back, and who devoted only a small portion of his valuable time to the *Anglo-Saxon*. The sub-editorship had been offered to him by the wish of some of the proprietors, and against that of Pilkington, who detested him, but nevertheless left the management of all details in his hands. It was he who wrote the paragraphs headed ‘Social Scraps ;’ and as

these for the most part referred to the doings of people of whom he knew absolutely nothing, he depended for his information upon various correspondents, and was as often as not led into making erroneous assertions by them. This, he was wont to declare, was not of the slightest consequence. Trifling misstatements broke no bones, and an action or two for libel tended to bring a paper into notice and increase its sale. But his chief, who took a different view, was made miserable by his repeated indiscretions.

'Larkins would alter the entire character of the paper immediately,' said Adrian.

'Oh, no doubt ; the question is whether the character of the paper had not better be altered. I won't affect to deny that, so far, it has hardly answered my expectations. It has been an experiment ; and, after all, I take it that the pleasure which one derives from making experiments consists chiefly in one's uncertainty as to how they will turn out.'

Adrian thought that depended a good deal upon whether one had staked two thousand pounds upon the result or not. 'For choice,' he remarked, 'I prefer the experiments which turn out well.'

'So do I,' answered Pilkington, smiling blandly; 'but 'tis not in mortal to command success. Without too much vanity, we may flatter ourselves that we have deserved it—you and I, at least. You were saying that you had some questions to ask me.'

Adrian would have liked to ask whether the *Anglo-Saxon* was paying its way, and how soon persons who had risked money in the undertaking might expect to receive some return for their investments ; but finding it rather difficult to put these inquiries into so many words, he said, 'Oh, I don't know that there was anything very particular after all. I wanted to know, in a general way, how things were going on.'

Apparently Mr. Pilkington did not think that this called for any rejoinder from him. He sat silent for a few moments, trimming his nails with a penknife, and then said, 'By the way, have you seen this week's number of the *Scorpion* ?'

'I don't think I have,' answered Adrian. 'Is there anything special in it ?'

'They treat us—or, perhaps, I ought rather to say you—to a column and a half of abuse. Here it is, if you care to look at it.' And he handed Adrian a copy of the paper in question, pointing out the article to which he had alluded.

It was headed, '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*' and from its opening sentences Adrian learnt that the *Anglo-Saxon*, in spite of its failure to command popular support, had, from the outset, afforded a great deal of amusement to its readers. It had not been taken seriously; but then (said the writer) any one who was at all behind the scenes must have known all along that it was not intended to be so taken. The editor possessed a delicate appreciation of humour, and it was impossible to doubt that he had had many a quiet laugh over the performances of the distinguished contributors whom he had prevailed upon to exhibit themselves in unwonted attitudes to an astonished public. The enjoyment that was afforded to him by his publication was probably analogous to that of the ingenious person who persuades elephants to stand on their heads on inverted tubs, and poodle-dogs to fire off pistols. The *Anglo-Saxon* had been thoroughly funny from first to last; but in nothing had the editor shown himself more determined to have his joke than in handing over the critical department to Mr. Adrian Vidal, an author who had produced one bad and one fairly good novel, but who was otherwise unknown to fame. Month after month this very self-satisfied young gentleman had been apportioning praise and censure among the greatest living writers of fiction with a gravity which was about the most comical thing that the spokesman of the *Scorpion* could remember. Then followed a list of some of the books which poor Adrian had been ordered to review, together with extracts from his comments upon them, which it was no very difficult matter to turn into ridicule. 'But,' continued the writer, pulling himself together, as it were, and becoming grave, 'there is a point at which incapacity ceases to provoke laughter; and after perusing Mr. Vidal's last effort, which deals with recent French novels, we are inclined to ask whether the time has not come for his removal into some other sphere of usefulness. Of the six works which he has singled out for unreserved commendation, we can only say that we hope never to see any one of them in the hands of an English lady.' The works referred to were then discussed as fully as the modesty of the writer would allow: 'and these,' he concluded, with righteous indignation, 'are the pretty stories which Mr. Vidal has the face to recommend for general reading.'

'I never did anything of the sort!' cried Adrian, throwing down the paper. 'I never recommended them for general

reading. I said they were admirable as works of art, and so they are. As for their morality, I didn't see that I was called upon to direct attention to that. Everybody knows that French novels must be judged by a standard altogether different from ours, and it would be perfectly ridiculous to begin each review by saying, "This plot is not one which an English author would have ventured to employ." The books were not objectionable of their kind, and the man who wrote this knows that as well as I do. It is a most dishonest and blackguardly attack !'

Pilkington continued to pare his nails : he did not manifest any responsive ire. 'I have not read the books,' he remarked.

'Read them, then, and judge for yourself,' said Adrian, feeling that his editor was not supporting him as he ought. 'As it happens, four out of the half-dozen books are by members of the Academy, and the remaining two are by men whom it would be the most absurd prudery to call immoral writers.'

'Yes ; but as a matter of fact, *are* the plots immoral ?' asked Pilkington.

'Why, of course they are, in one sense. The writing is not immoral—looking at it as a Frenchman would look.'

'I dare say not ; but attacks such as this, whether honest or not, are calculated to do us great harm with the public ; and if the facts upon which they are based cannot be denied, it is impossible to make any reply to them.'

Adrian, nevertheless, resolved that he would reply, and that his reply should be of such a nature as to cause not only his assailant, but every scribbler connected with the *Scorpion*, to writhe. Angry as he was already, he became much more so when he had picked up the paper again and finished the article, which, quite characteristically, carried its sting in its tail.

'We will not be too hard upon Mr. Vidal'—so ran the concluding paragraph. 'His taste in literature is peculiar ; but we are constrained to admit that its peculiarity is not so great but that a considerable number of so-called decent people share it with him, and we are willing to believe that he is personally as decent as the best of them. He has a right to his taste. But what he has no right to do, in his quality of critic—even though he be but the critic of a serio-comic publication like the *Anglo-Saxon*—is to advise our wives and

daughters to read books whose chief aim is to throw contempt upon those domestic and conjugal virtues for which, no doubt, Mr. Vidal's own private life is conspicuous.'

it was clear enough to Adrian that the last words must have been written by some one who was not unacquainted with the circumstances of his private life. An enemy had done this thing! 'Upon my soul!' he exclaimed aloud, 'I believe a thick stick would convey the most suitable rejoinder that could be made to such a fellow.'

'I think,' said Pilkington, holding up his hand before him, and admiring his carefully trimmed nails through half-closed eyes, 'that you had better keep your temper. There is nothing to be gained by responding to challenges of that kind—either with sticks or pens. Besides, your case is not a very good one. You admit that the books were immoral books, and it is certain that you praised them highly.'

'I praised what deserved praise in them, and held my tongue about the rest. I never recommended them.'

'Praise in a review implies recommendation, as a matter of course. The *Scorpion* is ill-natured and unjust; but to tell you the truth, Vidal, I think you have been guilty of a slight error in judgment.'

This was more than Adrian could stand. 'If that is the view that you take,' he answered with calm fury, 'my engagement on the *Anglo-Saxon* had better come to an end. I can't undertake to review books in such a way as to please the *Scorpion*; and, as regards this particular review, there isn't a single word in it which I should wish to alter.'

Pilkington contemplated his fingers for another minute or so before he remarked plaintively, 'This it is to be an editor! I believe I may truly say that, since I undertook the *Anglo-Saxon*, I have not made one solitary suggestion, however deferential, that has not been immediately followed by a threat of retirement on the part of the person to whom it has been addressed. Whether the experience of other editors coincides with mine I do not know; but if it does, I think it would be no more than common justice that our memoirs should be added to the next issue of the *Lives of Saints*.'

Some one who had entered the room unobserved during this speech here broke into a short laugh. 'All in good time,' said he. 'I will write the memoir myself, sooner than that it should remain unwritten; but it is impossible to canonise an editor until he or his journal has ceased to exist, and we can't

do without our *Anglo-Saxon* yet awhile, much less without our Pilkington.'

Pilkington had so much of the magnanimity which belongs to the truly great, that many other persons besides Percy Kean might probably have chaffed him with impunity, had they been so minded; but nobody else ever did so. He made a half-turn on his chair now, smiling indulgently.

'Ah, Kean,' he said, 'you are one of the people who know everything. Perhaps you can tell us for what reason the *Scorpion* has thought fit to fall upon us, tooth and nail.'

'Of course I can,' answered Kean. 'For the same reason that dogs delight to bark and bite, and bears and lions growl and fight. In addition to that, the *Scorpion* is a society paper, and thinks you have no business to go poaching on its preserves with your absurd "Social Scraps." Personally, I agree with the *Scorpion*.'

'Then let it fall foul of Larkins,' said Adrian, who was still at white heat. It is rather too bad that I am to be accused of all kinds of wickedness because the *Scorpion* has a grudge against a man with whom I have nothing whatsoever to do.'

'Oh, the *Scorpion* may have a grudge against you too, for anything that I know to the contrary,' returned Kean. I wouldn't let it get a rise out of me, though.'

'That is just what I have been telling him,' observed Pilkington; 'and because I do so, he threatens to desert me.'

'Oh, nonsense!' said Kean good-naturedly; 'he won't desert you, nor will I. No; we will never desert Mr. Micawber! Let who will play you false, Vidal and I will remain faithful to the end. Come along, Vidal, and have some lunch. I would ask our illustrious chief to join us; only I know he can't afford to be seen with the likes of me.'

And, taking Adrian by the arm, he led him out into the street before the latter had time to explain that Mr. Pilkington had not reported quite accurately the words which had prompted his offer of resignation.

CHAPTER XXXII

SOME FRIENDLY HINTS

IT was not without some trouble that Percy Kean persuaded Adrian to give up the idea of publishing a crushing reply to the *Scorpion*. ‘If your soul thirsts for vengeance,’ he said, ‘wait till you see a good opportunity of retaliating, and then come down upon them like a wolf on the fold. But I should strongly advise you to take no notice. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is wiser to take no notice. Moreover, I have a notion that you won’t write a great many more critiques for the *Anglo-Saxon*.’

‘You don’t think it is paying, then?’ asked Adrian anxiously.

‘I am quite sure it is not. With what amount of capital it started I don’t know; but I will venture to prophesy that it will last just as long as that amount lasts, and no longer.’

This was not pleasant hearing for Adrian; yet when he was once more alone, it was less the probable collapse of the *Anglo-Saxon* that distressed him than the thought of that venomous article as to which he had been told that he would be wise to keep silence. How many people would understand the significance of the allusion to his private life he could not tell; but he feared that a good many would, at all events, perceive that the words conveyed an allusion of some kind. About this time he became nervously observant of trifles, and soon saw, or fancied he saw, that the nicest women of his acquaintance were not quite so cordial in their manner towards him as they had been, while the others were growing more so.

Walking up St. James’s Street one day, he chanced upon Egerton, who stopped to speak to him, and while they were exchanging commonplaces it occurred to Adrian that he would ask this staunch supporter of the *Anglo-Saxon* to dinner. He would know, if any one did, what the financial position of the paper was; and his nature was so communicative that he would be pretty sure to refer to the subject in the course of the evening without being questioned.

‘And I’ll get Pilkington if I can,’ Adrian added, after his invitation had been accepted.

‘That will be very pleasant,’ said Egerton, looking down

the street. ‘As it isn’t the season, I dare say he’ll come.’ Then he rather abruptly withdrew his eyes from contemplation of the clock-tower to raise them to his companion’s face. ‘At your club, I think you said? Mrs. Vidal is still away, then?’ he asked.

‘She is still away,’ answered Adrian, a little surprised at the question; for he knew that Egerton was barely acquainted with his wife.

‘Oh, indeed,’ said the other. ‘Well, I hope we shall see her back in London again before long.’ He paused for a moment, then repeated, ‘I hope we shall see her back before long.’ After which he nodded and walked away.

This was tolerably plain speaking—so plain as to border upon impertinence; and what added emphasis to it was that Egerton was not, as a general thing, at all the kind of man to meddle with his neighbours’ domestic concerns.

‘I wish people would be good enough to mind their own business!’ muttered Adrian as he turned into Piccadilly.

But he ought to have known better than to waste his breath in such Utopian aspirations as that; and, indeed, it so happened that no later than the same evening he received an implied rebuke as unwelcome and as unexpected as Egerton’s had been.

During the hunting season Mr. Wilbraham was not very assiduous in his attendance at the House; but he ran up to London when he could spare the time, or when he was wanted to take part in a division, and Adrian not unfrequently encountered and exchanged salutations with him at evening parties. If their intercourse did not go farther than an amiable nod and smile on the one side, and a gruff ‘How are you?’ on the other, it was because Mr. Wilbraham had shown, in a manner not to be mistaken, that it gave him no sort of pleasure to talk to the popular young author. But now it seemed as if something out of the common must have induced him to abandon his attitude of armed neutrality in favour of a more aggressive one. His mien, at all events, was aggressive, if his words were not so, when he separated himself abruptly from a knot of friends with whom he had been conversing, and barred Adrian’s passage, saying, ‘I am told Mrs. Vidal is ill. I hope it is not true?’

‘There is nothing serious the matter, thank you,’ answered Adrian politely; ‘she has been a little out of sorts for some time.’

'She never used to be out of sorts,' returned the other, looking half inclined to pick a quarrel upon the strength of this statement. 'She always appeared to me to have as good health as anybody.'

'It is nothing serious,' Adrian repeated. 'She is not fond of London, and it has not agreed with her particularly well.'

'I'm sure I don't wonder at it!' cried Wilbraham. 'No-body could keep well in such a polluted atmosphere. I can't think how you can have expected her to stand it.'

'We should all like to have estates in the country,' remarked Adrian smiling; 'but as that can't be managed, some of us are obliged to live in the polluted atmosphere.'

'I should have thought one could write novels anywhere,' said Wilbraham; 'but of course one can't have a perpetual round of entertainments in the country.' And with that he turned on his heel and strode off.

Such rudeness was intensely disagreeable to Adrian, who would not, if he could have helped it, have incurred the dislike of a single fellow-mortal. He went home that night feeling sincerely sorry for himself. He was altogether out of luck, he thought. He was certainly not as popular as he had been: the articles which he had written for the *Anglo-Saxon* had brought him little money and a great deal of vexation; and now, it seemed, he was commonly regarded as a bad husband. Nothing had gone well with him since that calamitous day when Clare had caught him entertaining Lady St. Austell in her drawing-room. His partner in misfortune had left town immediately afterwards, and he had heard no more of her. It was not likely that she would have spoken to anybody about their detection: but now Adrian began to wonder whether the story were not too good a one for Lord St. Austell to keep long to himself. If that had been divulged, it would be easy to understand the insinuations of the *Scorpion*, as well as the advice of his friends that he should submit to them in silence.

For some days he went about with a gloomy face, and was unusually short in his replies to those who accosted him. Nor did the dinner to which he had invited Egerton and Pilkington serve to raise his spirits. From the first moment he saw that he had made a mistake in asking the two men to meet one another. It was plain that they were no longer upon such amicable terms as when he had last seen them together; Egerton in particular seeming to be out of temper,

and disposed to differ in a fretful sort of way from the eminent person to whose opinions he had always hitherto shown himself so eager to say ditto. Pilkington, on his side, while maintaining his wonted courtesy, contrived, as court people often do contrive, to be excessively provoking, and led his friend into saying some very foolish things, of which he then, with the most delicate consideration, pointed out the folly. No reference was made to the *Anglo-Saxon* during dinner; but that something would be said about it before his guests departed Adrian was very sure; because, as he wanted to know the worst, he was resolved to introduce the topic himself.

Later in the evening, therefore, he said, with the innocent air of a disinterested seeker after information, ‘I hope the sale of the *Anglo-Saxon* continues to be satisfactory?’

Egerton rose like a trout at a May-fly. ‘Continues! my dear fellow, it has never *begun* to be satisfactory. The first two or three numbers, perhaps—I believe they went off pretty well; but latterly it has been ruinous work. Simply ruinous, you know.’ And he looked somewhat indignantly at Pilkington, who blew a cloud of smoke from his cigarette, and watched it floating upwards to the ceiling.

‘The fact of the matter is,’ Egerton went on, ‘that we haven’t gone to work quite in the right way. At least, so it seems to me; but of course I’m not a literary man, and I only judge by what I hear from others.’

‘When I accepted the editorship,’ said Pilkington deliberately—‘and, as you may remember, Egerton, I did so with some reluctance—I merely stipulated that I should be allowed to manage the paper in my own way. I never promised that that way should seem the right way to others; nor did I guarantee that the paper should pay.’

‘You said you thought it would.’

‘Well, I said I thought it would. That was my opinion, which I gave for what it was worth, on being asked for it. No one can regret its failure to pay more than I do; and I may add that I should regret it just as much even if I did not happen to have a money interest in it. If the chief proprietors think that it would prosper more under other management, I shall most willingly retire from my post. In fact, I have already thought more than once of doing so.’

‘Oh, come,’ expostulated Egerton, ‘you mustn’t take it in that way, Pilkington; that wasn’t at all what I meant.

Your retirement would be the greatest possible loss to us, and—and I'm sure I hope you won't think of such a thing.'

Pilkington smiled. 'I don't know yet whether I shall retire or not,' he answered; 'but if I am scolded, I certainly shall.' And soon after this he said Good-night.

'Pilkington's a deuced awkward sort of fellow to get on with,' remarked Egerton after he was gone. 'You wouldn't think so to talk to him, but he is. All those little fads of his about having unusual paper and type, and so forth, have cost a lot of money, and as for his having a pecuniary interest in the undertaking—well, you know, that really doesn't amount to much. Nobody wants to dictate to him; but one has one's ideas, and he might at least condescend to listen to them. Instead of which, the moment that one hints at the possibility of his having made a mistake he begins to talk about resigning.'

'He complains that that is the way in which his contributors treat him,' remarked Adrian. 'I suppose the truth is that all people who write much are apt to grow irritable. We don't get enough of fresh air and exercise.'

'Perhaps that may be it. Anyhow, I don't think a man ought to be above being told of his mistakes, do you? If he had known of them, he wouldn't have made them, don't you see? Supposing I tell you that you have made a mistake in this or that, I take it that you, as a sensible man, will be rather grateful to me for letting you know of what you wouldn't have found out for yourself, eh?'

'Does that mean that you are going to tell me of some mistake that I have made?'

Egerton laughed. 'Well, you know, I think it's rather a mistake to have such articles written about one as that in the *Scorpion*.'

'It's a misfortune,' said Adrian; 'I really don't quite see how it's a mistake. You might as well say it's a mistake to get one's boots muddy on a wet day. I don't like muddy boots; but I know no way of keeping them clean, except staying at home. Of course, if I didn't write at all, the *Scorpion* couldn't make my writings an excuse for bespattering me.'

'Ah, well,' said Egerton, getting up, 'you literary fellows are all the same; it isn't much use to give you friendly hints. Nevertheless, you needn't get covered with mud if you walk circumspectly—take my word for it.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONSOLATION

IN spite of Adrian's assertions to the contrary, Clare was really somewhat out of health. She had not mentioned the fact in her letters to her husband, so that it was no fault of his if he was unaware of it ; but it must be confessed that she had made the most of her indisposition to her parents, who were as firmly convinced as Wilbraham himself that she was in no state to brave the dangers of the London atmosphere.

'I wish we could get poor Adrian down here too,' Mrs. Irvine was wont to say to her friends ; 'it can't be good for him to slave night and day as he does. But his work obliges him to remain within reach of the British Museum, you know, and—and such places ; and it is very kind and unselfish of him to spare Clare to us for so long.'

With the early spring, however, the roses came back to Clare's cheeks, and then she herself perceived that she had no excuse for neglecting her duties any longer. She was stronger by this time, and had to some extent—or so she believed—lived down her trouble. But, in truth, such troubles can only be lived down by means of a little wholesome indifference ; and this Clare had not been able to acquire. She returned to London determined to endure what could not be cured, and to show a brave front to misfortune in the future ; but, as she still loved her husband, and still despised herself for loving a man who had deceived her, the chance that these excellent resolutions would be kept was but a poor one.

Adrian was waiting for her at the terminus, and the moment that she caught sight of him on the platform she was struck with the change in his appearance. He was thinner, paler, and his face had a worn, anxious expression which she was puzzled to account for. Was he, too, unhappy, then ? In spite of herself, her heart softened towards him ; and because she felt that it was softening, she made her greeting somewhat colder and more formal than it need have been, even in that public place.

'Have you been quite well ?' she asked, hesitatingly, when her luggage had been collected, and she was driving

away from the station with her husband. Her voice sounded harsh as she put the question, and Adrian could not tell that this was only the result of an effort to steady it.

'I'm all right, thanks,' he answered shortly. 'And you are feeling better, I hope?'

'Yes,' she said; and then there was a pause, after which Adrian began to speak about some small household matters.

In truth, he was not just then in the mood to make advances or to recognise any that might be made to him. Latterly, many annoyances, small and great, had made life disagreeable to him, and in his heart he was disposed to hold Clare responsible for them all. But for her, he would never have been held up to reprobation in the public press, nor quietly dropped, in private life, by certain ladies whose notice he had learnt to prize. But for her, he would have been less reckless in his expenditure than he had been during the last few months, and more attentive to his work, which he had begun to neglect or hurry over, with results which were painfully apparent to him. He thought she deserved some punishment for the trouble which she had brought upon them both, and he wished for no reconciliation that should not promise to be a permanent one. He remembered that his wife had tried to impose conditions upon him on a former occasion, and he was as determined as ever that he would not have conditions. She must trust him first. After that he would willingly and of his own accord give up Lady St. Austell, or anyone else to whom she might object.

Theoretically, no doubt, there was something to be said in favour of this view; but if Adrian intended to wait until Clare acknowledged herself in the wrong, it seemed likely that he might wait until he was grey-headed; and in the meantime the house in Alexandra Gardens was not exactly an earthly paradise to either of its inmates. Both of them were miserable, and one of them happened also to be fretful. They tried to be distantly civil to one another, but there was no keeping it up. Distant civility was apt to degenerate into something like sulky silence; every now and then bitter little speeches forced their way out before they could be checked; and the husband and wife never felt at ease together unless some third person was present.

Thus, when Georgina suddenly appeared from the Arctic Circle, bringing with her a pair of reindeer's antlers, the skin of a polar bear, and divers powerful-smelling garments as

evidences of the genuineness of her expedition, she received a welcome so hearty that she could not entertain a doubt as to its sincerity. ‘My dear Georgina,’ Adrian said gravely, ‘you will have to come to us forthwith; it’s a case of simple necessity. Since you won’t consent to live with your mother, like a well-conducted young woman, it is evident that your brother’s house is the proper place for you, and I must insist upon taking you under my protection. The family can’t afford to trifle with its character. Even as it is, an amiable weekly newspaper has been kind enough to insinuate that I am no better than I should be.’

‘So I hear,’ remarked Georgina, looking rather hard at him. ‘I have already done my week in Brighton, and have been posted up in all the latest intelligence. Besides, I have seen Mr. De Wynt.’

‘Poor Mr. De Wynt!’ interjected Clare.

‘Why poor? I doubt whether he ever was poor Mr. De Wynt; but at any rate he is rich Mr. De Wynt now. His old uncle is dead at last, and has left him everything.’

‘Has he really? I am so glad!’ exclaimed Clare.

‘Are you? I don’t know that I am. I thought he did very well as he was, and I can’t imagine him a High Sheriff or a Deputy-Lieutenant.’

‘He is fitted for any position,’ Clare said emphatically.

‘And calculated to adorn it? Perhaps so, but it is impossible to say with any certainty, because there are some positions in which he will never find himself.’

Something in the tone in which the last words were spoken caused Clare to make a rapid deduction, and late that night she invaded her sister-in-law’s bedroom with the stern air of one who means to stand no nonsense.

‘Georgina,’ she said, without any introductory observations, ‘Mr. De Wynt has proposed to you and you have refused him?’

‘There is no evading your penetration,’ replied Georgina placidly. ‘He has—and I have.’

‘Then I must say,’ cried Clare in great vexation, ‘that I think you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself!’

‘Oh! Well, no doubt you know best. I am a poor simple creature, and I often do wrong without intending it; but why I ought to be ashamed of myself for refusing Mr. De Wynt, I don’t altogether understand. Is it because I am particularly fitted to be a Deputy-Lieutenant’s wife?’

'Not at all ; it is because you have been insane enough to refuse a man whom you love, and who very likely won't give you a second chance.'

'I beg to say,' replied Georgina, 'that I have never been in love in my life. If I felt the slightest symptom of such a disease coming on, I should instantly set sail for the Antarctic Ocean and never be heard of again. I should feel that I had *genossen das irdische Glück*, and that it was high time for me to disappear from civilised society.'

'It isn't the slightest use to talk to me like that,' returned Clare loftily ; 'it doesn't deceive me for a moment.'

'Very well, then ; I am pining for Mr. De Wynt. As soon as you leave the room, I shall throw myself, face downwards, on my bed and give way to a paroxysm of despair. All the same, I can't marry a man who has just come into a fortune, and whom I persistently snubbed when he was a comparative pauper.'

'If that is the only thing——'

'But it is not the only thing. As I explained to you long ago, the idea of marriage in the abstract is repugnant to me. A single life has its attractions, after all. Has your experience led you to believe that marriages never turn out badly ?'

Clare drew herself up slightly, and made no answer, not being sure whether Georgina had delivered this home-thrust accidentally or not. All doubt was removed from her mind by the latter, who went on—

'That was a brutal thing to say, was it not ? But, my dear, I intend to be brutal, and you can't stop me. Do you suppose it isn't as clear as the sun in heaven that you and Adrian have fallen out. Now sit down here beside me, and tell me the whole story from beginning to end.'

'I know you mean to be kind, Georgina,' began Clare hesitatingly.

'I do ; and that is why I am not going to let you put me down. I know I am not what is called a specially sympathetic woman ; but as a set-off, I am far more trustworthy than the generality of women ; added to which, I know my brother pretty well. I must not say that I know him better than you do ; but you will allow that I am likely to judge him with greater impartiality.' She rose from the low chair in which she had been sitting, and, taking Clare by the shoulders, forced her down into it. 'Come,' she said, as she perched herself sideways upon the arm, 'what is it all about ?'

Clare submitted. She was of too proud and reticent a nature to make such confessions easily ; but since it was impossible to deny that she had quarrelled with her husband, it might be as well, she thought, to tell Georgina the truth and have done with it. She did not, however, tell the whole truth. She cut her recital as short as she could, and would have suppressed, among other incidents, that of Lady St. Austell's clandestine visit to Alexandra Gardens, had she not wished to prove beyond a doubt that she was the victim of no hallucination as to Adrian's treachery.

Georgina's comments were brief and decisive. 'I see it all,' she declared. 'Adrian is a perfect imbecile. He always was, and I should be inclined to add that he always will be, only I hope that this may serve as a lesson to him. I don't know whether you are aware that he is rather more in love with you, if anything, than he was a year ago.'

Clare shook her head, and smiled slightly.

'Well, he is,' Georgina repeated. 'My dear child, you may shake your head till it rolls off your shoulders, but you won't convince me that I am mistaken. He is a thoroughly miserable man—and I am very glad of it. I don't want you to forgive him yet awhile. If you were capable of getting up a hard flirtation on your own score, it would be no bad thing ; but, as you won't do that, you had better continue your present course of treatment. I am not sure that, if I were a man, I shouldn't find it more terrible than the other. But please to bear in mind that *you* have no reason whatever to be miserable. I don't think so meanly of your intelligence as to believe that you are really jealous of poor Lady St. Austell, with her fat figure and her rouged cheeks. What you do complain of is that Adrian should seem to enjoy flirting with her or with anybody. It's only his way ; but it's a bad way, and I quite agree with you in thinking that he ought to be cured of it.'

It is doubtful whether Clare derived much comfort from the above observations. Nor, unfortunately, was Georgina's subsequent method with her brother the best that could have been adopted for bringing about an understanding between the divided couple. She treated him with a fine, hearty contempt, which might have amused him if he had not been too worried to be amused by it ; she scarcely answered him when he spoke to her ; and, if he ventured upon a humble joke, stared blankly at him without moving a muscle. She wished him, in short, to understand distinctly that he was in disgrace ;

and, as she never knew how to do things by halves, she ended by virtually sending him to Coventry in his own house.

Towards a man of Adrian's temperament it would have been difficult to take up a more injudicious line. The only effect that it produced upon him was to drive him away from home ; and when he did come home, he generally took care to bring friends with him. He was restless and excitable at this time, seeming to find his only pleasure in society ; he did very little work, and Clare noticed that he had become alarmingly careless about money. She did not know what his literary earnings might be ; but she feared that they could hardly be sufficient to warrant the continual little dinner parties that he gave, the addition of a man to their staff of indoor servants, and the hire of a brougham. These things made her uneasy ; and Georgina, now that poor De Wynt had been sent about his business, no longer provided her with a wholesome interest to withdraw her thoughts from her own unhappiness.

One small piece of consolation, which afterwards became a more important one, was afforded to her by the unexpected visit of a friend of her girlhood, of whom she had lost sight for some years, and who had joined a nursing sisterhood. Sister Jane, as this lady was now called, was sent, in the first instance, to appeal for help by the society to which she belonged ; but finding that Mrs. Vidal was interested in hearing about her work, she remained talking for some little time, and was persuaded to repeat her visit a few days later.

Clare looked with something like envy at this cheerful, plain-featured young woman, to whom the world had seemed rather a place in which to perform duties than to seek for happiness. In carrying out the former she had apparently found the latter. When questioned upon this point, she answered simply that she never had time to ask herself whether she enjoyed her life or not ; but that she was quite sure that she had not enjoyed it before entering the sisterhood. ‘For you it is very different,’ she added, divining what the wistful expression in Clare’s eyes meant. ‘If I had been beautiful, as you are, I should have expected quite another kind of existence, and I suppose very likely I should have got it. I don’t think there is any harm in that—only every woman ought to find her proper place, if she can. Those who are not ornamental had better try to be useful.’

But Clare thought it might be possible to be both. ‘Couldn’t you find something for me to do?’ she asked eagerly. ‘Couldn’t

I go to the hospitals, and—and read to the patients, or be of some help ?'

Sister Jane smiled. 'Well, I am afraid not. And you have your home duties, you know.'

'They are soon got through. I have a great deal of spare time—and I have no children,' said Clare, with a sigh.

'Would you like to go to the Children's Hospital sometimes ?' asked the other presently. 'You might really be of use there, if you cared to go. The children are always glad to see people ; and many of them must be kept lying on their backs for months, poor little souls ! Shall I take you there one day ?'

Clare jumped at the suggestion. When should she go ? To-morrow—the next day ?

'Well, to-morrow, if you like,' the good sister answered, smiling ; and thus it was that Clare was provided with a better cure for morbid self-communings than any that Georgina could have devised.

The bright, airy ward, with its rows of little iron beds, became a sort of haven of rest to her. When she entered it, it seemed to her that she left the world behind her—that weary, heartless, purposeless world in which women had nothing better to do than to make love to their friends' husbands, and where men were considered idiots if they devoted themselves to their wives. The children became fond of her. She took them toys, with which they managed to play in a serious, unchildlike fashion, as they lay there afflicted before their time with the curse of mortality. They did not understand why she so often had tears in her eyes, for the pathos of their condition was, happily, less evident to them than it was to her ; but they learnt to love her beautiful, sad face, and she developed a faculty for narrating stories, which rather astonished her, seeing that she had never suspected herself of being gifted with any great fecundity of imagination. Her husband, whose own imagination was becoming wofully sterile at this time, would perhaps have been grateful to her for a hint or two ; but she had not deemed it incumbent upon her to tell Adrian of her frequent visits to the Children's Hospital.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PROMOTION OF MR. LARKINS

AN author or an artist who has established himself firmly in the good graces of the public may, no doubt, produce rubbish from time to time with comparative impunity. His rubbish, unless it be of a very rubbishy order indeed, is likely enough to pass undetected ; and even in the contrary case he may count upon being pardoned, as carelessness is pardoned in an old servant. But it is quite otherwise with him who has scored but a single hit. He stands as yet upon no pedestal, he is still upon his trial ; and his first success tells rather against than for him, as fixing a standard which he is bound at least to reach, and is rather expected to surpass. Adrian Vidal knew this as well as anybody ; and yet, after managing to make himself famous with 'Two Lovers,' he sat down and wrote as ill-considered, long-winded, and pointless a story as ever came from the pen of a clever man. It was in a great measure the fault of the editor of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, who had offered high pay for a serial tale, to be commenced forthwith, and who, on learning that Mr. Vidal had no such tale ready, had declared that that need not stand in the way of an arrangement, provided that monthly instalments could be forwarded to him as they were wanted. Good novels have been written upon this plan sometimes, but probably not very often. Adrian started without having the slightest idea of how he was going to end, never got a grasp of his characters, and, having undertaken other work which interested him more, soon found this particular task a heavy burden, grievous to be borne. When he had written the last words, he was so relieved at getting the dreadful thing off his mind that he hardly realised how bad his performance had been, although he knew that it had been bad.

The consequence was that, as soon as he cast his three-volume novel among the critics, they sprang up and choked it. Nobody had a good word for it ; and, judging by the eloquent silence of his friends, Adrian concluded that their opinion fully coincided with that of their appointed guides. One acquaintance, more outspoken than the rest, caught him by the arm, as he was walking through the Park one morning, and

said, ‘My dear fellow, I’ve just been reading your book, and I’m sure you’ll excuse my telling you that it’s the stupidest book I ever read in all my life. How on earth came you to write such bosh?’

‘You are very kind,’ answered Adrian; ‘you seem to imply that I can write something that is not bosh.’

‘Oh, that’s of course. I read your other book—what was it called? “Free Lovers,” or something—and thought it first-rate. I’ll tell you what it is, old chap: you’ve been overdoing it—writing too much, you know. You take my advice, and go easy for a bit. You’ll find you’ll come up as fresh as paint next season.’

‘Very likely,’ said Adrian. But he added under his breath, as he walked on, ‘Always supposing that I survive to see another season.’

He was not a man who knew how to play a losing game, or to profit in any way by failure. Discouragement numbed his faculties and soured his temper; and it was not only the ill success of his novel that weighed upon his spirits just now. That, to be sure, was a serious matter enough, for he had arranged with his publishers for payment contingent upon the sale of the book, and there was now every reason to fear that he would get hardly a fourth of the sum upon which he had calculated; but what distressed him more than this was the unquestionable fact that he had ceased to be in request socially. Had the case been that of any other man than himself, he would have understood easily enough that the people who had wanted to know a small celebrity a year ago, had now satisfied their curiosity and wanted to know somebody else; but it was no more given to Adrian than it is to the generality of us to take an impartial survey of his own circumstances, and so he tormented himself with the notion that he was a sinking ship, and that the rats were leaving him.

That he was not quite in a seaworthy condition must be admitted. He had spent a good deal more money of late than he had any business to spend; he had counted upon receipts which had not come up to his expectations, and when he had found himself becoming somewhat seriously involved had grown indifferent to small extra expenses, after the time-honoured fashion of those who exceed their incomes. Upon the whole, he had very good and sufficient reasons for feeling depressed; although loss of popularity was perhaps not the most legitimate of them. He thought it a little hard that

there should be neither consolation nor sympathy for him at home. Of course, both Clare and Georgina must have heard of his literary fiasco ; but neither of them made the most distant reference to the subject, or betrayed any knowledge of his having published a new novel at all. It is true that if they had attempted to pity him he would promptly have represented their pity ; but he would have liked them to say that they were sorry nevertheless. Every one who has been in trouble must be aware that to snub one's comforters is one of the most precious privileges of affliction. This privilege was denied to Adrian, and he could not quite understand it. He was always expecting Clare's icy reserve to melt. 'She could not be so unrelenting if she had any real love for me,' he thought bitterly. And yet he might have known that if she had not loved him she would have been ready to make friends with him at once.

Once, and once only, she seemed to waver in her purpose. Entering the drawing-room softly, one evening before dinner, she found Adrian reclining in an arm-chair, his head supported by his left hand, while his right hung listlessly by his side. His back was turned towards her, and she stood for a moment watching him, and wondering what that attitude of exhaustion and dejection meant.

'Are you tired, Adrian ?' she asked at length.

He started and looked up. 'Tired ? No—not more than usual, I think.'

'You are not ill, are you ?' pursued Clare, after pausing awhile.

Adrian rose and walked to the window. 'Oh no ; I'm not ill that I know of,' he answered, rather peevishly. 'I don't feel in very rollicking spirits, that's all. Perhaps it would be rather odd if I did.'

It was then that Clare was very nearly forgetting all her wrongs. She followed her husband to the window, and said gently, 'May I know why you are out of spirits ?'

'Oh, certainly,' replied Adrian, with a short laugh. 'I have discovered that I have made a big mistake in my life, and I am afraid the discovery comes rather too late to be of much use.'

Clare froze again instantly. 'I am afraid it does,' she said, and left the room.

He was provoked with her for misunderstanding him so wilfully. He had meant her to question him further. Had

she done so he would have explained that he was referring to his career as a novelist; and then she might have tried to encourage him; and then perhaps—— But since she was pleased to assume him capable of alluding to his marriage as ‘a big mistake’—a thing which no gentleman would say to his wife—why, it was scarcely worth while to undeceive her. If that was the sort of opinion that she had of him, there would evidently be little use in attempting to interest her in his troubles. The latest addition to these had reached him half an hour before, in the shape of the following letter:

‘Office of the *Anglo-Saxon*, May 188—.

‘Dear Sir,—You have, no doubt, heard already that Mr. Pilkington has resigned the editorship of this journal, finding that his other occupations are likely to prevent him from discharging the duties connected with it in a manner satisfactory to himself. Under the new management some changes will be introduced into the character and appearance of the paper, with a view to increasing its popularity; but we fully expect to retain our customary list of contributors; and I may say, both on my own behalf and on that of the proprietors, that we shall be glad to receive from you such articles as you have been in the habit of writing for Mr. Pilkington. As regards remuneration, the proprietors think that this has hitherto been calculated upon rather too extravagant a scale, and it is probable that a temporary diminution, at all events, will be decided upon; but I shall be able to give you more definite information as to this in a few days’ time.

‘Believe me, dear sir, faithfully yours,

‘J. LARKINS,

‘Ed. *Anglo-Saxon*.’

There was a good deal in this communication which was highly displeasing to Adrian. He had not been informed of Pilkington’s retirement, and he thought that he ought to have been informed of it. He disliked Larkins personally, and had no belief at all in his power to improve the sale of the *Anglo-Saxon*. The proposed reduction of pay was not altogether agreeable. Finally, those references to the supreme will and pleasure of the proprietors struck him as being a trifle cool, seeing that he happened to be himself one of them. ‘I’ll be hanged if I’ll be one of them much longer, though!’ he said

decisively to himself, as he walked up the Strand on the ensuing morning. ‘I didn’t quite like to draw out my money so long as Pilkington held on; but I shall make no bones about it with this fellow.’

On reaching the *Anglo-Saxon* office, he found the editorial chair already occupied by its new tenant, a stout, vulgar-looking man, with a shock of iron-grey hair, bushy whiskers which met under his chin, and dirty nails.

‘How are you, Vidal?’ called out this unprepossessing person, cheerfully, as our hero entered. ‘Come to talk things over, eh?’

‘How do you do, Mr. Larkins?’ said Adrian, laying a very slight emphasis upon the prefix. ‘I received your letter, and I was sorry to hear of our loss.’

‘What, old Pilkington, do you mean? Well, between you and me and the post, he ain’t very much of a loss. It was about time he went. He’s a good fellow and a gentleman, all over, is Pilkington; but I can’t call to mind that I ever met a much worse editor. Now that we’ve got rid of him, we shall work the paper differently—put a little more life into it, and get some new blood. We mean to keep on most of the old lot though, all the same.’

‘That is, if you can,’ observed Adrian. ‘You mentioned something about lowering your scale of payments.’

‘My good fellow, it’s a case of needs must. I should delight in seeing you all paid at the rate of a guinea a word; but it don’t quite run to it, you see. If any of the old contributors aren’t satisfied—why, it won’t be a very hard matter to replace ’em. I hope you ain’t going to quarrel with your bread and butter.’

‘I don’t know as yet whether I shall continue to write for you or not,’ answered Adrian, repressing a strong inclination to assault his new chief; ‘but, independently of that, I have an interest in the paper. I put 2,000*l.* into it when it was first started, and I haven’t received a farthing of interest from that day to this. I think I should now like to realise.’

Larkins frowned and pulled his whiskers. ‘Oh!’ said he.

‘I suppose,’ continued Adrian interrogatively, ‘that I can do that?’

‘I suppose so. Oh yes; you can do that, no doubt. Only, if you do, you’ll be the first that has done it; and I don’t know that we should care to have you writing for us under those circumstances.’

'I am quite prepared,' answered Adrian smiling, 'to accept my dismissal.'

'That's what I call quarrelling with your bread and butter. However, please yourself. As I tell you, you'll be the first that has thought fit to act in that way. Pilkington, now—he hasn't said a word about taking out his money, though he has left us for good and all.'

'Really,' said Adrian, 'I can see no reason why I shouldn't withdraw from a bad investment when I am convinced that it is a bad one.'

'It all depends on how you look at it. When a few friends join together to start a paper it isn't quite the same thing as if they went to their brokers and told them to purchase securities. And as to bad investments, a newspaper seldom becomes a paying investment from the first.'

'I had nothing to do with the starting of the *Anglo-Saxon*,' said Adrian. 'Am I to understand that I shall be looked upon as a traitor now if I ask for the 2,000*l.* which I can't afford to lose ?'

'Well, I don't know about that. I fancy that Mr. Egerton and the others won't be best pleased. You see, it isn't only the loss of a couple of thousand pounds that they'll look at; it's the example. There are always plenty of people ready enough to do a shabby thing, if somebody will only give them a lead.'

'I consider that a most offensive expression,' retorted Adrian hotly. 'I am not in the habit of doing shabby things —nor of allowing any one to call me shabby either.'

'Well, well, Mr. Vidal, we needn't quarrel over it. I'm not speaking for myself; I'm only telling you what I believe will be the opinion of the proprietors. They naturally think that you owe something to them, considering that they took you up when you were a comparatively unknown writer.'

'I can't admit that I'm under any obligation whatsoever to them,' said Adrian.

'You may depend upon it that they think you are, and if you throw them over now, when the paper is passing through what one may call a sort of crisis, they won't like it. Of course, it's for you to decide what course you will adopt. Personally, I should be sorry to lose you as a contributor. With the money part of the business I am only indirectly concerned; but I don't think that, under any circumstances, you would be in much danger of losing your 2,000*l.* Supposing

that the worst came to the worst, and the paper failed altogether, I should doubt whether the gentlemen who have provided the bulk of the funds would wish those who have taken a smaller share in the undertaking to be out of pocket. Mind you, I have no authority for saying this; I merely mention it in confidence as my own impression. But you may be sure that the paper will not fail, if I can help it; and I have had rather more experience in this line than Pilkington.'

From all this Adrian perceived that Mr. Larkins was very unwilling to give him his money and let him go. That, perhaps, would have made a prudent man all the more determined to take his money and go; yet the upshot of the interview was, that both Mr. Vidal's pen and his purse remained at the service of the *Anglo-Saxon*. He had made too many enemies of late, he thought: he had no wish to add to their number. Moreover, the representations of Mr. Larkins were not without their effect upon him.

'Between ourselves, Mr. Vidal,' that worthy remarked, 'what we want is not so much a high-class literary journal as something that people will buy at the bookstalls. We shall come out weekly now, instead of monthly; our price, of course, will be sixpence; we shall devote more of our space to politics, and a good deal more to personalities; and we shall drop that stupid practice of making our writers sign their articles. I'll allow that Pilkington's notion was more original; but when originality don't pay its way, the best plan is to try being commonplace. Don't you think so?'

There seemed to be something in that.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLARE'S VISITORS

'FAR be it from me,' said Georgina, 'to speak a word against those who give themselves up to good works. I feel that I may slip upon a piece of orange-peel in the street any day, and be carried to the nearest hospital with a broken leg; and if that should happen to me, I have no doubt that I should fully appreciate the privilege of being nursed by a woman in my own rank of life. Besides, I have a genuine admiration

for people who prefer being of some service to humanity to sitting at home twirling their thumbs. But you will not get me to admire a woman who spends the best part of her time at the hospital merely in order that she may have an excuse for crying her eyes out when she comes home.'

It was on a fine afternoon in June that Miss Vidal addressed these pointed remarks to her sister-in-law. She was waiting for a friend who had promised to call for her and take her to the Park, and her costume was in all respects worthy of the season and the occasion. The summer had begun all of a sudden; the boxes outside the drawing-room windows had become gay with flowers; the hazy London sunshine was flooding the air, and the water-carts were going about the streets.

'You are the less likely to be called upon to admire her,' observed Clare, with a touch of asperity, 'as it is in the last degree improbable that such an idiot can exist.'

'She does exist, though,' rejoined Georgina imperturbably. 'I know that she exists, because I have the honour of being acquainted with her. To be more precise, she is sitting in your chair at the present moment.'

'I go to see the children at the hospital,' said Clare, 'because I like it, and because I believe they like having me. As for crying my eyes out, I certainly never do any such thing.'

'I will withdraw the words "crying her eyes out," then, and will substitute "looking heart-broken." You can't deny that you look heart-broken; and I don't care if you do deny it, the fact remains. Isn't it nearly time that all this came to an end?'

'All what?'

'This general discomfort. It can't be kept up for ever, you know, and I have to propose that we now eat humble pie. To do Adrian justice, he looks quite as miserable as you do; and he hasn't the solace of a Children's Hospital, remember.'

'I thought,' said Clare, 'that we had agreed to let this subject alone. I promised that I would not mention Mr. De Wynt again if you would only allow me to live my own life in my own way.'

'I recollect your making that handsome offer; but I don't recollect accepting it. You have my full leave to say anything that you please about Mr. De Wynt; only I should prefer your saying something unflattering, because I hear that he is

likely to be married to an heiress, whose property adjoins his, and I will go so far as to admit that my feelings are hurt. I don't think it is very pretty of him to console himself with such rapidity.'

'I don't believe it,' exclaimed Clare.

'It is too true, I fear; the report reached me on excellent authority,' said Georgina. 'But, after all, I don't want to be a dog in the manger, and I trust the heiress will prove satisfactory. Do you know,' she added presently, looking out of the window beside which she was seated, 'that you are about to have a visitor? That is quite an event in these days. He is a man—rather a feeble sort of man, judging by the time he is taking to get out of his hansom—still, not advanced in years. I do believe it is Mr. Heriot.'

Heriot indeed it was; and the first sight of him, as he entered the room, was somewhat of a shock to Clare. She had been accustomed for so long to hear her old friend spoken of as being in a dying state, that she had come to regard this as more or less of a figure of speech; but the moment that she saw his face now she knew that he was far worse than he had ever been before. She could not even ask him about his health; nor did he seem desirous of being questioned, for he merely mentioned that he had been ill all the winter, and had not been able to get farther than Cannes; after which he immediately changed the subject.

Georgina was soon taken away by her friend, and shortly afterwards Clare, chancing to look up at Heriot, discovered that he was scrutinising her with an earnestness which brought a faint flush into her cheeks.

'You have not been well since I saw you last,' he said abruptly.

'Not very,' she answered. 'It was—I don't know—there was nothing really the matter; and I am quite myself again now.'

Heriot stroked his beard and made no comment upon this assertion. 'And Adrian?' he resumed, after a minute or two. 'He has not written to me for a long time. I suppose that is a sign that he is very busy?'

'Yes; he is always busy, I believe.' Clare hesitated, and then went on: 'He is not satisfied with his last book—perhaps you have heard? I am afraid it has been a great disappointment to him.'

'Ah, that is the inevitable consequence of taking up art or

literature as a calling. There must be disappointments every now and then ; and poor Adrian is sure to take disappointments to heart. Now tell me about yourself. Have you become a confirmed Londoner yet ?'

Clare shook her head. 'I shall never be that ; but London suits me well enough. I go out very little in the evening now, and during the day I don't have many visitors.'

'That sounds rather a negative way of enjoying life,' Heriot remarked.

'I suppose it does ; but negative enjoyment is better than positive—discomfort ; and I should never have acquired a taste for society. I told you so last year, you know.'

'I remember,' answered Heriot ; 'it was at Lady St. Austell's garden party. By the way, are the St. Austells in town ?'

'I have no idea,' replied Clare ; and she was conscious of a change in her voice which could hardly fail to be perceptible to her interrogator. By way of accounting for it, she was proceeding to explain, 'I don't like Lord St. Austell,' when the door was thrown open, and who should walk in but that estimable nobleman himself !

Considering what were the circumstances under which this honour had last been conferred upon her, Clare certainly had not expected that it would be repeated. She was taken aback, and showed that she was so ; but Lord St. Austell did not seem to notice her embarrassment. He advanced with the smile of a guest whose welcome is assured, saying how delighted he was to see Mrs. Vidal looking so well—might he be allowed to add, looking so charming ? Then he screwed his glass into his eye, and was scarcely less delighted to recognise his friend Mr. Heriot, also looking—looking—er—as usual. It was perfectly impossible to assert that Heriot was looking well ; but Lord St. Austell went on, with creditable readiness : 'After a certain time of life, we must be contented with looking as usual, mustn't we ?'

'At no period of my life,' remarked Heriot quietly, 'have I been accused of presenting a charming aspect to the eye ; but I humbly trust that I have not always looked as if I had one foot in the grave.'

'Oh, you're all right—you wear as well as any of us,' said Lord St. Austell, who disliked allusions to the grave, and thought them in very doubtful taste.

He sat down and began to converse with easy fluency,

addressing his observations for the most part to Clare, who found herself quite unable to respond to them. She was so obviously uncomfortable that Heriot took pity upon her at length, and got up. Thereupon she threw him an imploring glance, which he rightly interpreted to mean that she did not want to be left alone with Lord St. Austell ; so he said to the latter,—

‘Is that your brougham that I see at the door ? Perhaps you will take pity on a sick man and give me a lift home ?’

‘My dear fellow, by all means !’ cried Lord St. Austell with alacrity. ‘The brougham shall take you to your own door, and then you can send it back for me. In the meantime, I dare say Mrs. Vidal will give me a cup of her excellent tea.’

This was not exactly what Heriot wanted. ‘Oh, I’ll wait till you have had your tea,’ he said.

But Lord St. Austell declared that he couldn’t think of such a thing. ‘Now, Mrs. Vidal, you must not ask him to stay ; he has no business to be out so late. Invalids always ought to be at home before six o’clock.’ And he caught Heriot by the arm and hurried him out of the room before another word could be said.

‘I think I disposed of our friend rather cleverly,’ he remarked on his return, seating himself complacently in a chair close to his hostess’s elbow.

Clare made an inarticulate murmur. She was really frightened of this leering old man ; and indeed his next speech showed that her alarm was not altogether groundless.

‘I have so hoped for this moment to come,’ he murmured. ‘I can’t tell you how I have suffered since I saw you last. I have had no peace.’

Indignation restored to Clare a measure of courage. She rose deliberately and moved to a chair a couple of yards away. ‘I am sorry to hear that,’ she replied. ‘What has been the matter with you ?—gout?’

Lord St. Austell jumped up and followed her with an agility which sufficiently refuted this cruel suggestion. ‘Ah, don’t pretend to misunderstand me !’ he pleaded, rather huskily—for, alas ! there comes a time of life when the human voice refuses to take pathetic modulations—‘you know why I have suffered ; you know that it is you who have made me suffer. Not intentionally—ah, no ! you are too angelic to inflict pain willingly upon anyone ; but——’

'I assure you that I am not at all angelic,' interrupted Clare, 'and I can't imagine what you mean by saying that I have inflicted pain upon you. I—I don't want to know what you mean,' she added hastily, perceiving that Lord St. Austell was about to explain.

'But I must tell you!' cried that susceptible veteran. 'It is impossible to conceal any longer the feelings of—er—of adoration with which the sight of so much beauty and—er—unhappiness has inspired me. Dearest Mrs. Vidal, don't be unhappy any more. Your husband has shown himself unworthy of you; but there is one who——'

'Please don't trouble yourself to say any more,' broke in Clare coldly. 'You are very impertinent; but I suppose that is because you know no better.'

Now Lord St. Austell had often been called impertinent before, and did not mind it in the least. He regarded it, indeed, as a purely conventional phrase, commonly employed by ladies under certain circumstances, and no more intended to be taken in a literal sense than the dismissal by which it was just as commonly followed. So with unabated confidence he proceeded to make his next move, and seizing Mrs. Vidal's hand, pressed it fervently to his lips.

This was too much alike for Clare's temper and her self-respect. 'Lord St. Austell,' she exclaimed, 'if you were not such an old man—such a very old man—I would ring the bell and have you turned out of the house. As it is, I can only suppose that you have become imbecile. Is it possible that you can imagine that any woman, whether married or single, could be in love with you?—*you*! I dare say many people would not be able to help laughing at you; but to me you are too horribly repulsive to be ludicrous. Of course, you will understand that I cannot receive you again after this.'

She had risen to her feet, as had also Lord St. Austell. His face had turned white, his eyes were glittering and his lips quivering. He seemed as if he were going to speak, but controlled himself. The fact was that his system of ethics, which permitted him to insult a lady in the manner above described, forbade him attack her with angry words. So he said nothing at all—not even 'good-bye'—but took his hat and went away.

Clare, as soon as she was alone, sank down upon the sofa and covered her face with her hands in an agony of shame. It was bad enough that any man should have presumed to

address her as Lord St. Austell had done ; but it was almost worse that she should have allowed herself to retort upon him so coarsely. Her cheeks burned when she thought of the words that she had used in her haste, and she felt that she could hardly have got rid of her tormentor in a less dignified manner.

Yet, if she had but known it, she had achieved a triumph of a certain kind ; for she was the only woman who had ever succeeded in putting Lord St. Austell into a genuine rage.

CHAPTER XXXVI

' AN END OF HIM '

IF Lord St. Austell very seldom permitted himself to be thoroughly angry, he was frequently out of sorts, and would snarl savagely at those about him because the weather was bad, or because he had received some troublesome letters, or because of fifty trifling vexations for which they were in no way responsible. His wife, on the other hand, who was easily moved to wrath and easily pacified, was too essentially good-natured to indulge often in a fit of general ill-temper. But these two people, like the rest of the world, had their exceptional days ; and it so chanced that while one of them was allowing passion to get the better of him, as narrated in the last chapter, the other was sitting in her boudoir in Grosvenor Square, looking as cross and sulky as any shrew.

Lady St. Austell had various reasons for being at odds with Fate. To begin with, an uncle of hers had chosen that inopportune time of year to have a long illness, and die at the end of it, so that she had only just been able to return to the city that she loved. And as though it were not bad enough to be defrauded of half her season, and to have to wear mourning (which was not becoming to her) for two months, the dressmaker must needs send her home half a dozen new frocks, of which four could not, by any amount of squeezing and struggling, be made to meet, while the remaining two were disgraceful misfits. Such trials were enough to upset anybody's equanimity ; but over and above these Lady St. Austell had that morning had the mortification of discovering

that there was something dreadfully wrong with her hair, which was coming out in positive handfuls ; and this had led her into an altercation with her maid, in the course of which the latter had addressed her most disrespectfully.

It was indeed rather of this maid’s behaviour than of her other annoyances that she was thinking as she sat alone and idle, one plump little hand supporting her cheek, while the other beat the devil’s tattoo upon the arm of her chair. The woman had been disagreeably familiar of late, and occasionally insolent. She had taken her own way rather too openly, and had even thrown out some veiled hints that if she were interfered with she would know how to retaliate. Lady St. Austell understood pretty well what these hints meant, and had thought it better not to notice them ; because it might, perhaps, be inconvenient if Bowman were to divulge all that that she had seen and heard during the past six months or so. But what was more disquieting was that Bowman seemed to be aware of certain things which she could not possibly have either seen or heard. ‘I wonder whether she reads my letters ?’ Lady St. Austell mused. ‘I don’t very much care if she does. There are only a few that I shouldn’t like her to see, and they are locked up fortunately.’

She glanced down at her châtelaine, upon which she kept the little Bramah key of the despatch-box that held these compromising documents, and suddenly started to her feet, exclaiming, ‘The wretch !’ The key was gone ; and, at the same moment, she remembered that the first thing that she had seen, on waking that morning, had been her despatch-box, which—owing no doubt, to the confusion attendant upon the unpacking of a host of trunks—had not yet been carried down to its accustomed place on her writing-table. Without losing a moment, she flew upstairs and burst impetuously into her bedroom.

A shriek and a loud crash greeted her entrance. There stood the guilty Susan, with an open letter in her hand ; and there, at her feet, lay the overturned despatch-box, its contents scattered over the carpet.

Susan’s previous experience of her mistress’s ways may have led her to expect a violent outbreak ; but if that was what she looked for, she was disappointed.

‘Bowman,’ said Lady St. Austell, quite quietly, ‘you will receive a month’s wages, and leave the house before night. You need not apply to me for a character.’

Susan made for the door without replying. But upon the threshold she halted and turned round with a malicious smile. ‘I think, my lady,’ said she, ‘you had better give me a character, if I ask for it.’

‘You had better not ask for it,’ replied Lady St. Austell coldly. ‘If you do, I shall give you the character that you deserve.’

‘Oh, very well, my lady; thank you. I’ll do as much for you—and more. I’ll give you the character that you deserve without waiting to be asked for it. You see, I’ve got something here that’s as good as a written character.’

It was the letter which she had been perusing when she had been so unexpectedly interrupted, and she now held it up between her finger and thumb with a nod of triumph.

Lady St. Austell seemed alarmed. She drew a step or two nearer to her maid, and said appealingly, ‘You wouldn’t do that, Bowman! You wouldn’t really steal one of my letters and give it to somebody else to read!’

‘Not unless you force me to it, my lady.’

‘Not unless I force you to it?’ repeated Lady St. Austell musingly. She approached a little closer still, her eyes were cast down, and she appeared to be lost in thought. All of a sudden she made a spring at the sheet of note-paper which was being waved menacingly over her head, and snatched it out of the grasp of the astonished Susan, who had not supposed that anything of that kind was coming. ‘Now you can go, Bowman,’ said she.

Susan cast a glance at the papers with which the floor was strewn. It would have been easy enough, perhaps, to possess herself of some of them; but whether she would not lose more than she would gain by a personal conflict with her employer seemed opened to doubt. ‘I’m sure I don’t want to make mischief, my lady,’ she said, ‘but I can’t afford to be ruined either. Find me another place, and I’ll hold my tongue. Refuse me a character, and I speak to his lordship this very day.’

Lady St. Austell was neither a very courageous nor a very wise woman; but she knew better than to fall into such a trap as this. ‘You can say what you please and do what you please,’ she replied; ‘but you will leave the house to-night, as I told you. If you are not gone by nine o’clock I shall send for a policeman and give you in charge for breaking open my despatch-box.’

It is not likely that Miss Bowman was much frightened by the latter threat ; but Lady St. Austell’s coolness was not without its effect upon her. She did as she was told, and went away, merely remarking, ‘Very good, my lady. Don’t say I didn’t let you have your choice, that’s all.’

The moment that she was gone, Lady St. Austell gathered up the scattered letters and ran down with them to her boudoir. She sat down, and sighed once or twice as she gazed at the various samples of masculine handwriting that lay on her lap. It grieved her to break these few remaining links with the past, some of which carried her back to a period when she had owed allegiance to no aged lord, and had dreamt of love in a cottage as a not altogether impossible form of happiness. But there was no time for indulging in sentimental retrospection now. She had chosen a castle in preference to a cottage, and it would never do to let written evidence remain which might deprive her of the residence that she had selected. In truth, that result was hardly one which could have been brought about by a perusal of the correspondence in question ; and had it been submitted to a jury of her ladyship’s fellow-countrymen, they would probably have come to the perfectly just conclusion that she had been nothing worse than indiscreet. But Lady St. Austell, not being quite so sure of that, and having an unreasoning dread of her husband, thought it best to be upon the safe side. She hastily dragged away the stand of flowers in pots which concealed the fireplace, and, casting the cherished relics into the empty grate, applied a lighted match to them.

No one who has not tried to burn a bundle of letters in a hurry can have any idea of the time that it takes to consume a few dozen sheets of paper. Quite half an hour elapsed before Lady St. Austell threw herself back in her chair, with flushed cheeks, muttering, ‘There ! Now, unless Johnny Spencer has kept some of my notes—which I don’t for a moment suppose that that hag of a wife of his will have allowed him to do—I think I am pretty safe.’

Hardly had she breathed these words when she was startled by a smart tap at the door, and before she could say ‘Come in,’ she found herself confronted with her husband. Decidedly, it was not a lucky afternoon. Lord St. Austell looked very black ; his customary grin had vanished altogether ; his thin lips were tightly set, and it was easy to see that he was in one of his least amiable humours.

‘Burning letters?’ he asked, with a glance at the shrivelled shreds of paper on the hearth. ‘An excellent plan. There is only one better as far as I know, and that is not to receive any.’

‘How can one help receiving letters?’ asked Lady St. Austell faintly.

‘I’m sure I don’t know—I wish to goodness I did! But your letters, I should imagine, are chiefly answers; and I can give you as practical a piece of advice about them as “Ask no questions, and you’ll be told no lies.” Don’t write rubbish to young fools, and you won’t have to scorch your face till you look like a cook by burning their replies on a hot summer afternoon.’

‘How coarse you are!’ cried Lady St. Austell indignantly. ‘I am not given to behaving in the way that you describe.’

‘Are you not? But I haven’t asked any questions, you know, so you needn’t—well, you needn’t answer. In point of fact, I don’t feel the slightest curiosity about the matter. All the same, I wouldn’t keep such a rascally lady’s-maid, if I were you.’

‘I am not going to keep her: I have just dismissed her. Has she been speaking to you?’

‘Yes, she has. Bounced out at me as I was coming upstairs, and began to pour out such a stream of venom that she positively frightened me. I told her to go to blazes.’

‘Did you really?’ exclaimed Lady St. Austell gratefully. ‘Thank you, Sydney; you acted like a gentleman.’

‘That appears to surprise you. Personally, I am not certain that it is very like a gentleman to use strong language to one’s inferiors; but she ought not to have bounced at me. I can’t stand being bounced at. She is a good-looking woman too,’ continued his lordship meditatively. ‘Cursed with a vile temper, though, I should think.’

His own temper seemed to have improved since he had entered the room; but presently his brow grew dark again. ‘I don’t often interfere with you,’ he resumed. ‘I let you choose your own acquaintances, as a rule. You don’t choose them wisely; but that is rather more your affair than mine. Every now and then, however, I must claim a right of veto; and just now you will oblige me by striking those Vidal people off your visiting list.’

‘By all means, if you wish it,’ answered Lady St. Austell,

with the most heartless alacrity. ‘I had almost forgotten that we knew them.’

Even Lord St. Austell could not help smiling at this. ‘The extraordinary part of it,’ he remarked, addressing himself to no one in particular, ‘is that she is speaking the simple truth.’

‘Of course I am speaking the truth,’ she returned ; ‘what is there so extraordinary in that ? I generally do speak the truth, if you only knew it. I told you nothing but the truth that unfortunate day when you found me at Mr. Vidal’s house ; and if you imagine that I have the least wish to see him again——’

‘I assure you I have never indulged in any speculations upon that point. All I know is that *I* don’t wish to see him again—or his wife either. They are objectionable, vulgar sort of people ; and we will not receive them any more, if you please.’

And with that Lord St. Austell, who, perhaps, feared that if he lingered he might be drawn into explanations which he would afterwards regret, picked up his hat and stick, and went off to his club.

On his way down Bruton Street he encountered a young man of amiable but somewhat jaded aspect, who smiled and half stopped, as though with the intention of accosting him ; but perhaps he did not recognise this young man, for he passed on, staring blankly at vacancy through his eye-glass, and Adrian, proceeding towards Grosvenor Square, muttered, ‘I wonder whether that was an intentional cut ?’

Adrian had heard that Lady St. Austell was in London, and, after some hesitation, he had decided to call upon her. He had been able to give himself various good reasons for so doing. It would be an act of common politeness ; it would show her that the unpleasant circumstances of their last meeting had not lessened his friendly regard for her, and so forth. But in reality he was going to Grosvenor Square because he was anxious to see how Lady St. Austell would receive him. Would she express any regret for having got him into trouble with his wife by her imprudence ? Would she show him the cold shoulder, as so many others had taken to doing of late ? Above all, would she join in the general condemnation of his new book ? There was little enough danger of her offending him in this last particular, seeing that

she did not so much as know that he had published another work ; but such ignorance as that he may be pardoned for not having foreseen, and he stepped on towards his doom with more or less of cheerful anticipation.

He was admitted into the long drawing-room which he knew so well, and was kept waiting about a quarter of an hour before Lady St. Austell appeared. When she did appear, it was with an air of hurry and preoccupation. She said, ‘Oh, how do you do?’—and, sitting down, began to open and examine a number of notes—invitations apparently—which she had carried in with her, addressing a little perfunctory conversation to her visitor while she did so.

Presently she rose, crossed the room to her writing-table, and began to scribble off replies. ‘May I trouble you to ring the bell?’ she said ; and when a servant presented himself, she wanted to know why the *menu* had not been sent up to her. Let it be brought immediately. And covers were to be laid for sixteen, not fourteen. Had the flowers arrived from the country ? and had anybody unpacked them yet ? From time to time she threw a remark or a question over her shoulder at Adrian. ‘How hot it is to-day, is it not ?’ ‘Can you tell me what the day of the month is ?’ ‘Have you been long in London ?’ &c., &c.

All this evidently meant, ‘I don’t want to be bothered with callers just now, and I should be much obliged if you would take yourself off.’ It is never exactly agreeable to receive such broad hints ; but if Adrian’s mind had been in its normal condition, he would have retired gracefully, without showing any foolish consciousness of having been snubbed. His condition of mind, however, happened at that time to be abnormal, and he could not for the life of him help showing that he was angry.

‘My name is Vidal, and I live in London,’ he said at length. ‘I mention these facts because you appear to have forgotten who I am.’

‘Oh no,’ answered Lady St. Austell, laughing a little ; ‘I remember you quite well.’

‘Then may I ask whether I have offended you in any way ? Because, if you remember me at all, you must remember that we were rather friends a few months ago.’

Lady St. Austell laughed again. She would have preferred that Mr. Vidal should go away in a huff without demanding explanations ; but the main thing, after all, was to get rid of

him, and she knew that she could do that in a very few minutes.

‘I don’t go in for undying friendships,’ she replied. ‘When people begin to claim the privileges of friends they invariably begin to be bores.’

‘I should be sorry to be a bore,’ said Adrian, getting up, ‘and I think I may safely take upon myself to say that you will not find me one; for I shall certainly claim no privileges of any sort or kind in future. You are quite right to throw me overboard; you only follow the fashion. Everybody else is doing the same.’

‘Can’t you swim?’ asked Lady St. Austell, with an air of innocent wonder.

‘I am almost afraid not; but whether I swim or sink, I suppose the ship will sail on without me much as usual. Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye,’ said Lady St. Austell sweetly; and thus Adrian left the house in Grosvenor Square for the last time.

‘So there is an end of *him*,’ mused her ladyship after he had gone. ‘I don’t think I regret him much. He was extremely good looking; but he didn’t seem to know how to use his advantages, and I was getting very tired of him. I wonder what he meant by people having thrown him overboard? Perhaps they are getting tired of him too. That would not astonish me.’

CHAPTER XXXVII

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

AMONG the oral traditions of the Vidal family it is related that, at the tender age of five and a half, Adrian, who had been guilty of some infantile misdemeanour, was sentenced to a period of solitary confinement extending over several hours. At the expiration of the term the nurse was sent to release the prisoner, and, on approaching the apartment in which he was locked up, was horrified at encountering a strong smell of burning. ‘I do believe that wicked boy have gone and tumbled into the fire, just to spite his mar!’ she is reported to have exclaimed. Adrian, however, had not adopted quite so extreme a measure. He was found seated on the hearth-

rug, in a state of absolute nudity, pensively contemplating the slow combustion of his boots, which, together with his shirt, tunic, and other articles of apparel, he had placed upon the red-hot coals, and which by this time were reduced very nearly to ashes. When Mrs. Vidal, in her cold way, asked him what he had expected to gain by this act of incendiarism, he replied to the effect that his object had been twofold. In the first place, he had wanted something to do ; in the second, he had considered that the punishment inflicted upon him was out of all proportion to his offence, and as it had not been in his power to lessen the former, he had felt it incumbent upon him to establish an equilibrium by increasing the latter. The destruction of his clothing had seemed to him the readiest means of achieving this end, and he had destroyed his clothing accordingly.

More than once in later life Adrian acted upon a similar principle, though perhaps without acknowledging it so plainly either to himself or to others. At the period of his history to which we have now come, he was suffering under a deep sense of wrong. Everybody had treated him badly—his wife, his critics, Lady St. Austell, the editor and proprietors of the *Anglo-Saxon*—in short, the world at large ; and his nature forbade him to sit down and brood over unmerited ill-usage. It was no discredit to him that he felt the same necessity in his manhood as in his childhood to be doing something ; but it was certainly unfortunate that he had not grown out of the childish notion that that something, in order to be at all satisfactory, must be more or less naughty.

If he had been asked why at this time he joined himself to a rather faster set than any that he had hitherto been mixed up with, and why he made himself conspicuous by his attentions to certain ladies who were known to delight in conspicuous attentions, he might have replied that he wanted to drown care ; but it may be assumed that the pain thus inflicted upon his wife was not only known to him, but, in a measure, agreeable. He had spoken of being thrown overboard ; but in reality he could still go to two or three parties on most nights, if he was so inclined ; and it suited him to do so. There was no longer any question of Clare's accompanying him ; she, as has been seen, had adopted another method of dealing with care. Sometimes, however, he had the honour of escorting his sister into the world.

Georgina so far resembled her brother that she was fond

of society, and could not endure inaction. Possibly, she may have resembled him in the further particular of thinking society the best cure for low spirits. She was, at all events, not so cheerful as she had been the year before, and many of her friends noted a disposition towards silence and listlessness on her part, which had never been among her characteristics, and for which they were at a loss to account.

A still more remarkable phenomenon—nothing less, indeed, than a genuine and vivid blush—might have been seen upon the countenance of Miss Vidal one evening in July, at a ball to which she and her brother, among several hundreds of others, had been invited. But as nobody could have expected to witness such a manifestation, it probably escaped notice, and was certainly not observed by the individual who was responsible for it. He said, ‘How do you do, Miss Vidal?’ without any apparent embarrassment, and Georgina quickly recovered her self-possession.

‘So here you are back in London again,’ was her greeting.

‘Yes,’ answered De Wynt, ‘here I am again; and I want to talk to you, if I may.’

Georgina drew her skirts away from the few extra inches of bench which they had been covering. ‘Sit down,’ she said, ‘and proceed. What is your news?’

‘It isn’t exactly news,’ answered De Wynt, squeezing his small person into the space cleared for him. ‘That is, I am not sure how far it may be news to you; but most likely you don’t hear all that I do. You know your sister-in-law was awfully kind to me while you were away.’

‘Was she? I have no doubt you deserved her kindness.’

‘I don’t know about that; but she was kind to me. And your brother—well, he is your brother.’

‘That is undeniable.’

‘So that even if I didn’t care about him for his own sake, I should for the sake of others; and I don’t like to see him going to—to— May I speak plainly?’

‘By all means. You don’t like to see him going to the devil.’

‘I meant to say, the dogs; but perhaps the other expression comes nearer the truth.’

‘And how are you going to prevent him from reaching his destination, whatever it may be?’

‘I don’t suppose I can prevent him; but you might. I know you think I attach too much importance to what the

world says ; but I do assure you that no man can afford to be talked about as people are talking about Vidal now. And that isn't all. I am afraid he is coming to grief in other ways. I am afraid he is getting indifferent about his work, and running into debt. I don't apologise for repeating what I hear to you, because I am sure you won't misunderstand my motives. No doubt a great part of it is not true ; but it is safe to conclude that a small part is.'

'As far as I can judge, it is all true,' said Georgina with a sigh.

'Well, we know pretty well what the meaning of it is, and the cause of it, and that the whole thing could be set straight if only one of two persons would give way just a little bit. Now, I don't think there's much good in speaking to Mrs. Vidal.'

'I don't think there is,' agreed Georgina. 'I made my little effort in that quarter, and the result was discouraging.'

'Heriot might help ; but he's too ill to leave his house, poor beggar, and Vidal won't go near him. He told me so the other day, when I looked him up. So you see, there really is only you.'

'And what am I to do ?' inquired Georgina.

'I shouldn't venture to suggest. I am rather dull, as you know ; and you are very clever.'

'Clever as I am, I confess that I don't quite see my way. If people will insist upon marrying, I am afraid they must accept the natural consequences of their folly.'

'Quarrels and misunderstandings are not the natural consequences of marriage,' said De Wynt dogmatically.

'Are they not ? Well, I never was married myself, so I can only judge by appearances. You, I hear, will soon be in a position to speak authoritatively upon the point.'

'What do you mean ?' asked De Wynt.

'It is currently reported that you are about to be married—and to an heiress, too. I don't mean to assert that marriages of that kind are acts of folly.'

'Whoever told you that I was going to be married told you a—a deliberate falsehood !' cried De Wynt warmly. 'No one can possibly have believed such a thing—you least of all.'

'I did believe it, though ; why should I not ? You will probably marry one of these days.'

'I don't know. It will depend upon whether the only

woman whom I shall ever ask to marry me persists in refusing me or not. But, as I was saying, marriages don't necessarily bring about dissensions. When they do, it is because there has been no previous understanding. Now, I do think that you and I understand one another perfectly. You have your tastes and I have my little prejudices. We should both have to give way to a certain extent ; but I don't think we should mind that—at least, I am sure I should not. Only, I should have to bar the South Sea Islands. When one has a property to look after, one can't go quite so far as that every winter.'

'It seems to me,' remarked Georgina, 'that we are getting very far indeed from the subject that we started with.'

'No, not so very ; because, supposing that we could act together, we might see our friends through their troubles, I think ; and I am sure that I could be of use in many ways, if only you would give me the right to be of use.'

'But, Mr. De Wynt, I have told you already that I cannot accept your offer.'

'You never gave me any reason for refusing it, though. If you tell me that you don't care enough about me to marry me, there's an end of it, and I won't bother you any more ; but if it is only that I happen to have come into a little money—'

'You have been writing to Clare !' broke in Georgina suspiciously.

'Yes, I have ; I am not ashamed to confess it ; and it was she who told me what you said about not choosing to marry a man who had just inherited a fortune. As though I should be likely to think that you would accept me for that reason ! Now, Miss Vidal, I have a right to an honest answer. Can you or can't you care for me ?'

'You are very peremptory. A ball-room is not the proper place for this sort of thing.'

'Nobody is looking at us ; and I shouldn't care if everybody was. Don't keep me in suspense any longer. I have been very patient—I think you will allow that—and surely I am entitled to an answer now.'

'If you are quite convinced that it is my duty to Adrian and Clare,' began Georgina.

'It is your duty to yourself to answer Yes, if you can,' said De Wynt earnestly. 'And your duty to me too,' he added.

'Ah, yes ; I foresee that I shall hear a good deal about my duty to you. Well—I surrender, then. It's an uncondi-

tional surrender. I haven't the slightest belief in your give-and-take system, you know. Of two people, one must rule and the other must be ruled ; and I suppose perhaps you had better be the ruler. Give me your orders, and I will humbly endeavour to execute them.'

But De Wynt had no specific commands to give ; and although the newly-engaged pair did not separate for another hour, it must be confessed that at the end of that time they had agreed upon nothing more precise than that it behoved Georgina to 'speak to' her brother.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE WRATH OF MR. WILBRAHAM

DOUBTLESS there are circumstances under which it becomes a duty to inform some relative or friend that he is conducting himself like a perfect idiot ; but under no circumstances can this duty be an agreeable one to those who are at all likely to discharge themselves of it with success. The people who find satisfaction in it are precisely those who might keep silence with advantage. Georgina's announcement of her engagement brought her such hearty congratulations from her brother that she felt it impossible to attack him then and there upon the subject of his misdemeanours ; and when, a few days later—being urged thereto by De Wynt—she ventured upon a tentative remonstrance, he checked her at once.

'For Heaven's sake,' he exclaimed, 'don't begin to scold ! I am not sure what are the crimes that you suppose me to have been guilty of ; but to save time, let us say that I have broken the entire Decalogue at a blow, like Moses. Well, I don't repent. I am not in a repentant humour, and you won't bring me into one by telling me what a poor opinion you have of me. Really and truly, you had better leave me alone.'

Georgina was very much inclined to agree with him. She secretly sympathised far more with her brother than with her sister-in-law, and thought that the latter had brought the greater part of her troubles upon herself. As she did not deem it prudent to say this, she held her tongue.

In the meantime, De Wynt was not the only person who was keeping a watchful eye upon Adrian and his proceedings.

From the outset Mr. Wilbraham had detested his successful rival. Indeed, he was a man to whom successful rivals were very apt to be detestable, and he would, no doubt, have discovered plenty of defects in Adrian's character, if the latter had not saved him the trouble of making any research in that direction. When, therefore, he saw Vidal dancing half the night through with that naughty little Mrs. Black, or sitting in dark corners with the more demure but not less dangerous Mrs. White, and when at balls, dinner-parties, and crushes, he looked in vain for Vidal's wife, his blood began to boil. Where was Mrs. Vidal? Did that fellow lock her up, so that he might be the more free to carry on his endless flirtations? Did he ill-treat her? Did he beat her? Wilbraham believed that the man was capable of it. His apprehensions became at length so harassing to him that he resolved to find out whether they were well founded or not by the simple expedient of calling in Alexandra Gardens. Some men might have felt this to be an act of doubtful wisdom; but it did not appear so to Wilbraham, who would no more have thought of making love to his neighbour's wife than of picking his neighbour's pocket, and who merely wished to be assured that the woman who might have ruled over his heart and household was contented with the destiny which she had chosen in preference to that. What course he was prepared to adopt in the contrary event, he had not asked himself.

He found Clare at home and alone. She was sitting beside her work-table, and as she rose to receive him, laying down the doll which she had been dressing, a faint blush mounted into her cheeks. Evidently she was a little surprised at seeing Wilbraham, who had never until now chosen to darken her doors; but she did not express her surprise in words, and it was he who experienced a momentary embarrassment. He accounted for his presence, after a few minutes, by saying—

'I called to see whether you were still alive, Mrs. Vidal. I meet your husband almost every evening; but you, never. Why do you hide yourself from your friends in this way?'

'The few friends that I have in London know where to find me,' answered Clare. 'I am not particularly fond of parties.'

'Yet you used to be fond of them. I don't think anybody enjoyed balls more than you did in Rome.'

'Ah, that was a very long time ago.'

'Two years.'

'Well, two and a half. But two years may be a long time. It all depends what has happened in the course of them. One can't manage to enjoy dancing after one is married quite as much as one did before.'

'Your husband——' began Wilbraham, but stopped himself. It would be rather bad taste to tell her that her husband did not find matrimony incompatible with social diversions; and, besides, she could hardly require to be informed of that fact. 'You were ill nearly the whole winter, were you not?' he asked abruptly. 'You don't look very well now.'

'Don't I? I feel perfectly well,' answered Clare; 'and I was not really ill then. I am afraid I am always ready to make the most of any excuse for getting out of London.'

'Of course you are!' cried Wilbraham warmly; 'and quite right too! A born and bred Londoner may go on filling his lungs with coal-smoke, and persuading himself that he likes it; but as for anybody who has been accustomed to breathe *air* keeping well here, I simply wouldn't believe him upon his oath if he asserted such a thing. And why on earth should you live in a place which you hate, and which doesn't agree with you? Vidal isn't a doctor or a lawyer, or anything of that kind. You ought to insist upon his moving into the country.'

Wilbraham fastened eagerly upon this grievance, in default of a better, and made himself quite hot over it. His vehemence rather amused Clare, who laid her work down upon her knees and looked up at him with a smile.

'Married people can't insist upon having everything that they wish for,' she remarked. 'Some day, perhaps, Mrs. Wilbraham will insist upon spending the greater part of the year in London; and then what will you say?'

'I shall give in—or rather I *should* give in. I don't say that I should like it; but I would let her have her own way if I thought it would make her happy, and I certainly shouldn't hesitate for a moment if I thought her health depended upon it. However, it does not much matter, as the case will not arise.'

'Let us hope not. Still, it may.'

'Excuse me, it cannot arise. I shall never have an opportunity of showing my devotion to Mrs. Wilbraham, for the excellent reason that there never will be a Mrs. Wilbraham. I think you must know that.'

Clare stitched on at her work without replying, and presently Wilbraham asked, 'Do you mind my saying so?'

'I would rather you did not talk like that,' answered Clare, glancing up at him for a moment. 'It—it seems such a pity.'

The pity of it all was very visible to her. She could not help being touched by the constancy of the man whom she had rejected, and contrasting it with the inconstancy of the man to whom she had given all the love that she had to bestow. She could not help seeing what a much happier thing it would have been if she had been able to love the first instead of the second—much happier, not only for Wilbraham and for her, but for Adrian himself, as well as for the clan of young Irvines, whose respective careers might have been made smooth for them by a rich and powerful brother-in-law. But she had not been able to love Wilbraham; she had not been able to help loving Adrian; and so everybody concerned had been disappointed. There was no use in thinking about it, still less in talking about it—but it was a pity.

Wilbraham unconsciously echoed the last of her thoughts, without having divined the preceding ones. 'Yes, it's a pity,' he agreed; 'but, as you say, there's no use in talking about it.'

Apparently he did not find it easy to hit upon any other theme of conversation, for he sat for some time in silence, gazing at Clare, who had resumed her occupation of putting little naked dolls into decent clothing.

'What are you going to do with those things?' he asked at length.

'With the dolls? I am going to take them to my children.'
'Your children?'

'At the hospital, I mean. Did you know that there was such a place as a Children's Hospital in London? I did not, until a short time ago. Somehow one doesn't associate the idea of suffering with children. Yet they do suffer—some of them dreadfully; and I think the saddest part of it all is their patience.'

'Poor little things!' said Wilbraham. 'Do they want money at this hospital?'

'All hospitals want money,' answered Clare smiling.

'I'll remember. And so you take them dolls and things! Do you go there often?'

'I manage to go there most days. They have got to know me now; and I flatter myself that some of them are disappointed when I don't appear. I enjoy sitting with my children much more than going to balls.'

'Well, but that isn't quite natural,' remonstrated Wilbraham. 'It's very good of you, and just like you, to take pleasure in visiting the sick; but it ought not to be your only pleasure. At your age you ought to like amusement.'

'But I don't, you see.'

'That is just it; that shows that there must be something wrong. No one who was happy at home would want to—to run off to a hospital every day.'

This was assuming a little too much, and Clare perceived that she had been imprudent in allowing such an inference to be drawn. 'I did not mean you to understand that I was unhappy at home,' she said, with a slight accent of displeasure. 'I don't know why you are so determined to take that for granted. I remember that you said the same thing to me a year ago.'

'Yes, I know. I ought not to say it, I suppose; but I can't pretend that your happiness is a matter of indifference to me. It was not very likely that I should cease to care from the moment that you married whether you were happy or not. Can you tell me that you are?'

'You have no right to ask,' returned Clare. 'Supposing that I were as miserable as you wish me to make out, I certainly should not like to confess it; but you would put me into such a position that I should be almost obliged to confess it. The truth is that you can't believe in the possibility of my being happy with any one except yourself. You made up your mind from the first that my husband and I were not suited to each other; and when you discover that he is fond of society, and that I am not, you begin to triumph.'

This was rather hard upon poor Wilbraham; but Clare felt that she must be hard upon him if she wished to preserve her self-respect. To complain to him of Adrian would be disgraceful, and to let him go away with the impression that cause for complaint existed would be scarcely less so.

Such, nevertheless, was the impression with which he did go away. He accepted his rebuke meekly enough. He apologised, and begged Clare to forgive him; but not the less was he convinced that she was martyr. He left the house full of pity and anger, and with a bitter sense of impotence. She had chosen her lot, and neither he nor any one else could alter it. That fellow would go on as he had begun—if indeed he did not grow worse as he grew older—and the end of it would be that some fine morning he would elope with one of

the married women to whom he was so fond of paying court. Just the sort of thing that a man of that description was bound to do sooner or later !

' I should dearly love to break his head for him ! ' muttered Mr. Wilbraham as he strode down Cromwell Road, brandishing his stick and scowling fiercely at the surprised pedestrians whom he met in that interminable thoroughfare.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CHILL PENURY

IT is said by the experienced in such matters that there can be no greater mistake than altering the name of a newspaper or magazine which has been for a certain time before the public. According to this theory (which, if correct, exhibits the intelligence of the ordinary reader in a somewhat startling light), you may change your politics, your editor, your writers, and other trifling adjuncts without thereby lessening your average sale, since those who have been purchasers will continue to be purchasers from mere force of habit ; but the moment that you adopt a new title your publication becomes a new one, and must fight its way into popular recognition in the face of the customary difficulties. Possibly, the proprietors of the *Anglo-Saxon* may have been advised to this effect when they took to themselves a fresh editor, revised their list of contributors, and decided to bring their periodical out once a week instead of once a month. If so, they had perhaps omitted to take into account that there may be just as much risk in retaining a name associated with failure as in discarding one which has hitherto been connected with success. Be that as it may, the young *Anglo-Saxon* could not be got to rise resplendent from the ashes of the old. Country clubs and reading-rooms did not seem to care about it, the railway traveller fought shy of it, and its contemporaries did not welcome its appearance in that brotherly spirit which the enlightened mind is ever ready to display towards a rival.

Of course, there were various ways of accounting for so discouraging a state of affairs. The editor averred that the cold shade of Pilkington still brooded over his paper ; Egerton

complained that the tone of the principal articles was too flippant to please ; while Adrian was inclined to attribute the small sales to the invincible stupidity of the public, against which, as we know, the gods themselves contend in vain. But there could be no difference of opinion as to the fact that the paper was not paying, had not paid in the past, and showed little sign of paying in the future. That being so, the time seemed to have nearly come for singing its requiem. And one disconsolate contributor only sighed and murmured 'I expected this,' when he received a note from his chief briefly informing him that the forthcoming number of the *Anglo-Saxon* would be its last.

Obviously, the very first thing to be ascertained was what effect this collapse was likely to have upon the pecuniary interests of the humbler proprietors ; and Adrian promptly set forth to seek out Mr. Larkins and question him upon the point. For three days he sought him in vain. Larkins was not at the office, he was not at his club, nor could he be heard of at his private residence at St. John's Wood, which *ultima Thule* Adrian reconnoitred without avail.

'It really almost looks as if the man wanted to keep out my way !' he exclaimed, at last, to Percy Kean, whom he had chanced upon in the course of his peregrinations, and who laughed and said,—

'I don't know why he should want to keep out of your way. You can't bully him, now that he isn't your editor any more.'

'I never did bully him ; it was he who used to bully me. I am anxious to see him now, because I happen to have invested 2,000*l.* in his confounded paper, and I should like to have them back, if quite convenient.'

Kean whistled. 'You don't say so ! I had no idea you were such a—h'm—public-spirited fellow. But what are you going to do with poor Larkins when you catch him ? I don't suppose you'll find your two thousand inside him if you kill him and cut him open.'

'No ; but he always managed the money, I believe. At least, I used to be paid for my articles by cheques bearing his signature.'

'Oh ! Well, there may be a balance of 2,000*l.* at the bank for him to draw upon ; but I shouldn't think it was over and above likely. If I were you I should look up old Egerton. That's your best chance.'

Adrian rather thought it was, though at the same time it did not strike him that his best chance was a particularly good one. However, he betook himself to the house of Mr. Egerton, whom he found not only at home, but quite ready to condole with him.

'Upon my word, Vidal,' said he, 'I feel quite ashamed when I think that it was I who originally led you into joining this fiasco of an *Anglo-Saxon*. All I can say is that I honestly believed I was doing you a good turn at the time.'

'I am sure you did,' answered Adrian. 'You couldn't foresee that it would be a fiasco.'

'No, by George! nor that it would be such an expensive one either. If I had—but there's no use in grumbling about it. It's the old story, you know—a fool and his money. Well, I shall know better another time.'

'You consider your money lost, then?'

'It's all spent, at any rate. In fact, I don't know that I shall not have to spend a little more, for we haven't finally squared up accounts yet. I suppose it's all right; but it seems to me as if this paper must have been utterly mismanaged.'

'I put two thousand into it,' observed Adrian mournfully.

'Sorry to hear it. Pilkington tells me that he did the same.'

'I imagined from what he said that he had put in more. It was he who persuaded me to make the investment, though I was rather unwilling to do so. But I did think that I should at least be able to withdraw my money when I wished.'

'So you could, I suppose, so long as it was there to be withdrawn. What was to prevent you?'

'Mr. Larkins prevented me. That is, he represented that I should give offence if I left you just at the time when the paper was taking a fresh start. And he gave me to understand that the chief proprietors would not allow me to incur any loss.'

'If Larkins said that,' cried Egerton reddening, 'he said a most improper thing! Larkins seems to think that he can take the coats off our backs, and that we shall immediately offer him our cloaks also. I am sincerely sorry that you should have dropped money; but if I make myself responsible for other people's losses in addition to my own, may I be part proprietor of an infernal silly newspaper for the rest of my

days ! You must see yourself that such demands are preposterous.'

'I am quite aware that I have no legal claim,' began Adrian.

'Nor any moral claim either, that I can see.'

'Well, I hardly know as to that. I must say that Mr. Larkins warned me that he was speaking without authority ; but he certainly led me to believe that I might safely leave my money where it was, and upon the strength of that I did leave it where it was.'

'Well,' said Egerton, who was walking about the room with his hands in his pockets, 'I'll be hanged if I see it ! You have a case against Larkins, I allow ; but why didn't you come to me and ask whether we were really such fools as he made us out ? You see, if we indemnified you, we couldn't well refuse to indemnify Pilkington, and, for anything that I know, half a dozen others into the bargain. It's rather too much to expect of us that we should do that.'

Adrian could not but feel that it was. He went away with the melancholy conviction that he had not only failed in the object of his visit, but had left a disagreeable impression behind him. Though still a young man, he had lived long enough in the world to be aware that those who have been the victims of sharp practice should never proclaim themselves victims. Enmity may be obtained in that way, and sometimes contempt ; but restitution never. Moreover, he had caused Egerton to lose his temper and speak sharply ; and that is an offence which no man can easily forgive.

These reflections kept our luckless hero company as he wended his way westwards, and very poor company he found them. It annoyed him to think that he had behaved in an undignified manner ; but a momentary loss of dignity was not, after all, so bad as the permanent loss of 2,000*l.* ; and this, again, was but a trifle in comparison with the sacrifices which he knew that he must shortly make in order to meet his liabilities. When to these causes for unhappiness he added the failure of his last novel, the coldness of many of his friends, and last, not least, Clare's stubborn resentment, he felt that he was indeed justified in calling himself a miserable man. He would have to go home and tell his wife that their style of living must be reduced. Probably they would be obliged to move into a smaller house ; certainly they would have to give up such superfluous luxuries as entertaining their

friends at dinner and keeping a man-servant. The whole prospect was gloomy enough. ‘I might as well die, and have done with it !’ inwardly ejaculated Adrian in one of those outbursts of petulance which had lately become common with him.

It was getting late in the afternoon when he entered the Park, and, striking across it, saw in the distance that slowly flowing stream of carriages which, at a certain season of the year, may be taken as fairly representative of the wealth and aristocracy of England. ‘Good-bye !’ he murmured regretfully, as he gazed at the colour and glitter of that significant procession. To him it was significant ; to him it was the expression of a life which he loved, and which he was leaving. Fashionable society had treated him very kindly, and had endeared itself to him, not because he was infected either by the old form of snobbishness which worships a coronet, or by the baser form of modern snobbishness which bows down before a full purse, but because well-bred people are more agreeable to associate with than those who are not well-bred, and because even rich people are able to surround themselves with refinements which are denied to the poor. Adrian thoroughly appreciated these refinements ; he liked to have pretty things about him, to look at pretty faces and listen to soft voices, and to sit down to dinner at tables made beautiful by cunning floral decoration. But now there must be an end of all that. What his future life would be like, he could only conjecture dimly ; but that it would have to be ruled for some time to come by a rigid economy was certain, and every pleasure that entailed expenditure must be sternly rejected. The one solace to which he was able to look forward was hard work ; and even hard work can give little comfort to a man who has begun to doubt his powers.

Now, it is perfectly possible to walk along the streets of London, lost in a sombre reverie and pensively swinging your umbrella between your finger and thumb, so long as you steer straight ahead and remember the rule of the road for foot-passengers ; but any sudden change of course demands a more careful look-out ; and of this Adrian was made aware when, on turning a sharp corner in the neighbourhood of Cromwell Road, he came violently into collision with a big man who was twirling a big stick.

The stick caught Adrian’s umbrella and sent it flying into the middle of the road ; the man nearly knocked Adrian

himself off his legs, and then, with great presence of mind, called out, ‘Why the devil don’t you look where you are going, sir?’

‘My dear Wilbraham,’ remonstrated Adrian mildly, ‘is that the tone of voice in which to address a man whose best umbrella you have just deposited in a sea of mud?’

‘Oh, how do you do, Vidal? I didn’t know it was you, said the other. ‘Beg your pardon, I’m sure. It was your own fault, all the same.’

‘I suppose so,’ observed Adrian meekly; ‘I notice that most things are my fault. I much resemble the lamb who couldn’t help interfering with the wolf’s water-supply even though he did drink lower down the stream.’

Wilbraham snorted, without making any articulate response.

He was not by nature a quarrelsome man, but he was in a very quarrelsome mood; and at that moment nothing would have afforded him greater delight than to roll Adrian over in the mud beside his umbrella. As this was not practicable, he very foolishly determined to relieve his feelings by giving Vidal a piece of his mind.

‘I have just been at your house,’ he began, in a decidedly aggressive tone.

‘Yes?’ said Adrian. ‘I am sorry I was not at home, but I hope you saw Mrs. Vidal.’

‘I did; and I was shocked to see her looking so pale and ill.’

Adrian’s brows drew together. ‘I don’t think you had any occasion for being shocked,’ he remarked. ‘My wife is quite well.’

‘I thought her looking very pale and ill,’ repeated Wilbraham doggedly. ‘I’m not surprised at it either. Are you aware that she goes every day of her life to a hospital, where she may catch scarlet fever, or measles, or—or goodness knows what? How you can allow her to run such risks I can’t understand!’

‘Infectious cases are not taken at the hospital which you speak of,’ answered Adrian very quietly; ‘and will you excuse my adding that I don’t care about being told what my duty to my wife is?’ He saw that the other meant to pick a quarrel with him, and he was not himself in the humour to put up with much impertinence.

‘I dare say you don’t,’ retorted Wilbraham, with a short

laugh. ‘No ; I should think your duty to your wife would be about the last thing you would like to be told of.’

‘May I ask what you mean by that?’

‘Certainly you may ; and I’ll answer you too. I mean that it isn’t doing your duty to your wife to keep her mewed up at home while you go larking about all over the place. I mean that it isn’t doing your duty to your wife to make love to every silly woman you meet. That’s what I mean.’

‘As that description does not apply to me,’ observed Adrian, still preserving a calm exterior, ‘I don’t know that I need notice it.’

‘You can notice it or not, as you please,’ returned Wilbraham, evidently disappointed. ‘If you think the cap don’t fit you, you had better consult Mrs. Vidal. Perhaps she may take a different view.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Adrian hotly, ‘do you mean to say that she——’

‘I don’t mean to say another word about the matter, except that I consider that the cap fits. And if you ask me my personal opinion of a fellow who acts in that way, I haven’t the least objection to telling you that I look upon him as a blackguard.’

What in the world is to be done with a man who stops you in a public thoroughfare and calls you a blackguard? A Frenchman, of course, would have no difficulty in answering the question ; but an Englishman, to whom custom has denied the use of pistol and small-sword, has little choice between passing on with the ignoble retort of ‘You’re another,’ and doing as Adrian did, and hitting out with his left.

The objections to this latter course are obvious, and they become greatly increased if you unfortunately fail to knock your antagonist down. Wilbraham, who was not unskilled in the art of self-defence, avoided the blow, dropped his stick, and threw himself into a fighting attitude ; and a most merciful thing it was, both for the respectable member of Parliament and for the distinguished literary man concerned, that Police Constable Z 99 came round the corner at this juncture with measured tread, and, taking in the situation at a glance, interposed his bulky person between the combatants.

‘Now then!—now then!’ said he ; ‘just stop that, will yer? A couple o’ gents like you!—you ought to know better. Now, are you a-goin’ to walk off quiet, or would you rayther come along o’ me to the perlice station?’

Everybody knows the effect of a pinch of snuff upon two dogs who have fastened on one another. However enraged they may be, however intrepid, they must needs leave go in order to sneeze ; and it frequently happens that, having sneezed, they will trot away in opposite directions to think things over. Honour has been satisfied, and a fight which ends in a draw is very nearly as good as a victory. It was thus that Messrs. Wilbraham and Vidal went their several ways without exchanging another word or look, and thus the readers of the daily papers were defrauded of a delightful bit of scandal.

CHAPTER XL

ADRIAN'S LAST ATTEMPT

ADRIAN walked home in a white heat, and his anger was only to a small extent against Wilbraham. The man had insulted him grossly and stupidly, and he had done what he could to avenge the insult. If he had not exactly succeeded in washing it out in blood, that did not signify so very much, after all. What hurt him far more than anything that Wilbraham could say was the thought that Clare had complained of her lot to an outsider. Had he been less incensed, he would have known that to complain to an outsider was about the last thing that she was likely to do ; but he had not all his wits about him, and he was under the impression that Wilbraham had given himself out as being in some sort Mrs. Vidal's spokesman as well as her champion. That was the last straw ! It was rather hard that, with the sense of his wrongs strong upon him, he should have to go straight to Clare and make a humiliating confession ; but there was no help for it—the confession must be made. To confine himself to the bare announcement that he had been extravagant, and must retrench, would—though disagreeable enough—be plain sailing. Many a man is compelled to make such announcements to his wife ; and she, if she be worthy of the name of wife, will be pretty sure to try and console him, instead of reproaching him. But Adrian rather doubted whether he would be able to stop there, and doubted still more whether anything would be gained by proceeding farther. He bitterly regretted now

that he had put himself in the wrong by pretending to flirt with women whom he neither liked nor respected. If he accused Clare of having traduced him to a third person, she would have an answer ready to which it might not be easy to find a rejoinder ; for the legal maxim of ‘the greater the truth, the greater the libel,’ is one which has never yet commended itself to feminine minds. On reaching Alexandra Gardens he turned and walked back for some distance, and then turned again, debating with himself whether he should tell Clare of his encounter with Wilbraham or not ; and when at length he entered his house he had reached no decision.

He had still several hours in which to cool down and consider himself ; for he found Georgina in the drawing-room, and presently De Wynt, who had been asked to dine, came in. Unfortunately, however, the presence of De Wynt did not serve to soothe Adrian's irritated nerves. Why is it that, during the interval which separates betrothal from marriage, ninety-nine couples out of a hundred become a standing affliction to all who are forced to dwell under the same roof with them ? Why are they for ever exchanging meaning glances ? Why must they needs indulge in mute demonstrations which everybody in the room sees perfectly plainly, but which they absurdly assume to be visible only to themselves ? What strong delusion possesses them, that they seem to take a positive pride in conduct which they would ridicule and despise in anybody else ? A happy thing it is for them that they speedily forget this period of insanity—forget it as we have all forgotten the time when we were red and squalling infants. But those who saw us as infants do not forget the circumstance. They may forget a good deal about us, but they never forget that ; and never fail to remind us of it. Nor is the behaviour of engaged lovers ever forgotten by those unfortunates who have chanced to be shut up in the house with them for a few days. Let young lovers bear this truth in mind, and tremble.

The worst of it is that age would seem to be no safeguard against the above-mentioned malady. Georgina and De Wynt—neither of whom was in the first blush of youth—were quite as ridiculous as any boy and girl ; and even Clare, heartily as she rejoiced in the engagement which she had done her best to bring about, was obliged to admit that they were not the best of company at this time. De Wynt was by far the greater offender of the two. Georgina, true to her prin-

ciple of self-effacement, simply did what he told her and appeared to delight in this unwonted attitude of compliance ; but he—whether because he wished to indemnify himself for many years of sober common-sense, or because he really was not responsible for his actions—went on in a way which was found very trying by his future brother-in-law, and which did little credit to his reputation for tact.

'I say, Vidal, you're not really busy just now ; what should you say to our giving ourselves a three or four days' holiday on the river ?' he began, in a sort of 'let's-all-be-happy-together' tone, as soon as he had taken his place at the dinner-table. 'We would take it easy, you know, you and I pulling, and one of the ladies steering for us ; and whenever we thought we had had enough work, we could stop a night at one of those jolly little riverside inns. Don't you think that's a first-rate idea ?'

'I dare say it is,' answered Adrian shortly ; 'but unfortunately I couldn't manage to get away at present.'

'Oh, bosh !' returned De Wynt ; 'you can if you choose.—Mrs. Vidal, you get him to come. He won't refuse you.'

Clare said, 'I doubt whether either of you would be equal to the exertion of pulling up stream for several days. Besides, it might come on to rain.'

But De Wynt was not to be discouraged. He now turned to Georgina, and, with one of those pregnant glances which have been alluded to above as characteristic of the betrothed lover, persisted :—'We should all enjoy it. You would, wouldn't you ? And so would Mrs. Vidal—and so would Vidal, really. They only want to be stirred up. Do use your eloquence upon them.'

'I think it would be great fun,' responded the submissive Georgina.

Thereupon Adrian lost patience and exclaimed, 'It would, indeed ! We should be a gay and frolicsome party. Only, as I can't possibly go, I am afraid we shall have to content ourselves with keeping up our usual flow of uproarious jollity at home.'

He knew perfectly well what De Wynt was driving at, and was not ungrateful to the little man, whose good intentions he recognised ; but it was rather exasperating to be treated as though he and his wife were a couple of children who had had a tiff, and must be reconciled by older and wiser persons.

De Wynt was silenced for the time being ; but he returned

to the charge repeatedly in the course of the evening, employing all kinds of transparent stratagems to get Clare and Adrian to speak to one another, suggesting various absurd projects, and accepting the snubs which he thus brought down upon himself with the most inexorable good-humour.

Towards eleven o'clock he rose to depart. Adrian, as in duty bound, begged him to stay a little longer and smoke a cigar, trusting that the invitation would not be accepted, yet experiencing a slight chill of disappointment when it was declined. Most of us, as we stand upon the dentist's door-step, have just the shadow of a faint hope that he may not be at home ; but he always is at home, and we should be justly indignant with him if he were not. By the time that Adrian had shut the front door behind his guest he had overcome his momentary longing for a reprieve, and only wished to get through the coming bad quarter of an hour as speedily as might be. He walked back to the foot of the staircase and called to Clare, who was just preparing to ascend to her bedroom.

'Would you mind coming into the study for a few minutes ?' he asked.

She looked a little startled, he thought ; but she turned at once and came down. Presently she followed him into the little room, which was but partially lighted by the shaded lamp upon the writing-table, and silently awaited his pleasure. Neither of them sat down.

'I wanted to tell you,' Adrian began, looking away from her as he spoke, 'that I have got into difficulties. I have made much less this year than I expected to make ; our expenses have been heavier than I thought they would be, and to-day I heard of the loss of some money which I had invested in the *Anglo-Saxon*. The upshot of it all is that we shall have to make a change in our manner of living.'

He glanced quickly at Clare when he had made this brief statement ; but she did not reply, nor did she seem to be in any way moved.

'I am very sorry about it,' he went on, after a pause. 'I have been unlucky ; but I have been imprudent too, and I certainly owe you an apology. Perhaps I ought also to apologise for having written a stupid book which nobody will buy. I might have known that I am not the sort of writer to make money.'

'It will be easy to economise,' said Clare quietly.

Adrian was not sure that he quite liked this indifference. ‘It will be necessary ; I don’t know about it’s being easy,’ he observed. ‘We shall have to make sacrifices—to give up this house, for instance.’

Then for the first time Clare exhibited some sign of interest. ‘Shall we go away from London ?’ she asked.

‘Is that the only thing that you care about ?’ cried Adrian irritably. ‘No ; I don’t suppose we shall leave London. I don’t think it would be wise to do so ; I don’t see any reason for our doing so. Why should we ?’

‘I don’t like London.’

‘Well,’ said Adrian, subduing his impatience, ‘that is a reason, no doubt. The only question is, would you be any happier in the country ? You are not happy here ; I am quite aware of that.’

To this Clare made no reply.

‘Yet you might be. At least, I think you might. To live always with a man whom you distrust and suspect—that is enough to make anyone unhappy. But is it so certain that you are right to distrust and suspect me ? Just ask yourself the question. Why have we been strangers all this long, weary time ? Has it been worth while ? Has there been any real cause for it ?’

Clare’s lips were quivering, but she did not open them. Her eyes were cast down upon her fingers, which she was intertwining nervously. The time had been long and weary to her—more so, perhaps, than it had been to him ; yet she could not say that she had had no cause to distrust him ; and therefore it seemed best to say nothing.

‘Let us go back to the beginning,’ resumed Adrian. ‘It all began—did it not ?—with your dislike of Lady St. Austell. You saw that she was a flirt, and you couldn’t trust me with her. You did not see that, besides being a flirt, she was a stout, middle-aged woman ; though that might have reassured you, even if you could feel no confidence in me. And then, most unfortunately, you found her in the house. You wouldn’t listen to my explanations ; and it was hopeless to try and force them upon you. Besides, I confess that I was angry, as I really think that I had a right to be. But one can’t go on being angry for ever—at least, I can’t. The explanation was simple enough. Lady St. Austell came here, not for the pleasure of seeing me, but to scandalise Lord Blaise, who had taken upon himself to rebuke her ; and when

she came I could hardly send her away. That is the whole truth ; I hope you believe it.'

He waited for some time ; but, as Clare still continued silent, he repeated, in a somewhat sharper tone, 'Do you or do you not believe that I never cared a brass farthing for Lady St. Austell ?'

Clare had turned very pale. She remembered the scene which she had witnessed in Kensington Gardens ; of that, no explanation was possible. She could forgive her husband, but to tell a lie or to acquiesce in one was beyond her. 'I want to believe you !' she exclaimed, spreading out her hands with a despairing gesture ; 'but I can't ! Adrian, I would so much rather—so much, much rather that you told me the truth !'

'I have told you the truth,' answered Adrian coldly, 'and you have refused to believe me. You need not be afraid that I shall make any more attempts. I have already acknowledged that I have been very much to blame in living too extravagantly. In addition to that, I have latterly—for reasons which you may or may not understand—gone more into society than a married man ought to do without his wife. Neither of these offences will be repeated, and I cannot accuse myself of having failed in my duty to you in any other respect. I have only one thing more to say. I must request that any future complaint which you may have to make of my conduct may be made to me, and not to Mr. Wilbraham, or to other persons of your acquaintance.'

'I never complained to Mr. Wilbraham !' cried Clare, suddenly bursting into tears. 'How could you—how could you think—'

Adrian smiled coldly. 'You doubted my word just now,' he said. 'Excuse me if I take the liberty of doubting yours. For such a very distrustful person, you seem to choose your confidants rather rashly, and I should recommend, both for my sake and your own, that in future you should trust nobody.'

After this there was silence for a few minutes, broken only by Clare's stifled sobs ; then Adrian held the door open for her, and she passed out without another word.

CHAPTER XLI

THE RESULT OF AN ACCIDENT

ADRIAN, when he was once more alone, and could review the incidents of the painful interview just described, congratulated himself in that he had at least kept his temper. He might have done more wisely to lose it. The impression which Clare carried away with her was that her husband cared very little whether their quarrel was made up or not. His language had been in some measure conciliatory, but it had not been in the least affectionate ; and his object, Clare thought, had been rather to place her in the wrong than to convince her that he loved her still.

So far he had been successful ; for he had certainly made it appear as though she were in the wrong. Yet in his heart he must have known that it was not so. Before her eyes he had embraced Lady St. Austell, and to ask her after that to believe that he had never cared a brass farthing for the woman was to make too large a demand upon her credulity. If he had confessed, she could have forgiven him—not very easily, perhaps, since forgiveness of such injuries did not come easily to her ; still, she could have forgiven him. But to make a fresh start upon the false assumption that she had been mistaken all along was neither possible nor desirable. The accusation which Adrian had brought against her of having bemoaned her fate to Mr. Wilbraham did not trouble her long, nor did she even feel much curiosity as to the source whence he had derived his information. At any other time she would have been more distressed by it ; but now it seemed a little thing in comparison with the dreadful certainty which she felt that she and her husband could never again be to each other what they had once been.

She lay awake through the greater part of the night, turning it all over in her mind ; and always the same conclusion stared her in the face—it would be better that they should part. The argument which has kept many a woman from leaving an unhappy home was not present in her case. She had no children ; no one would suffer by her setting Adrian free to follow his own devices ; she herself would be the happier in some ways for having done so, and it was beyond all ques-

tion that he would be. For her own future she had a plan which, vague at first, developed gradually into a fixed purpose. Her experience at the Children's Hospital had shown her that she possessed some of the qualities of a good sick nurse, and such technical training as she would need to enable her to adopt nursing as an occupation would, she thought, be acquired without difficulty. Sister Jane would doubtless be willing to give her information and assistance.

On the following morning Adrian went out early, leaving word that he would not be home again before dinner-time, and Georgina also departed for Brighton, whither she had been summoned to receive the formal congratulations of her mother, and to be presented with certain articles of jewellery, 'for which,' as Mrs. Vidal the elder wrote, with the graciousness which distinguished her, 'I have no further use.' Clare, being thus left alone, had ample leisure for considering her scheme, and the more she thought of it the more advisable it seemed to her to put it into practice without delay. Every one knows the value of an accomplished fact; and it seemed to her that if she were to pack up her clothes quietly, leave her home, and write to her husband to inform him of the step that she had taken, she would forestall a good deal of the opposition which was to be expected both from him and from her own family. The only point as to which she felt a little uncertain was whether Sister Jane would be able and disposed to give her shelter under such circumstances.

She was sitting in the dining-room, making a pretence of eating the luncheon for which she had no appetite, and trying to make up her mind that she would go and consult her friend that afternoon, when, as if in answer to her half-formed intention, the following telegram from Sister Jane herself was delivered to her :

'Come to me here, at once, if you can. I want particularly to see you.' The address given was that of the hospital served by the society to which Sister Jane belonged.

Clare was on her way in less than ten minutes. She was too much preoccupied with her own affairs to think of anything else during the greater part of the long drive, and it was only towards the end of it that she began to wonder why she had been so hastily summoned. The explanation which she received on reaching her destination mystified her completely.

'The poor woman will be very glad to hear that you have

come,' Sister Jane said. 'She has been asking for you incessantly since the morning.'

'What poor woman?' asked Clare. 'You did not say anything about her in your telegram.'

'Did I not? Her name is Susan Bowman. It is an accident case. She was run over in the street and brought in here a few days ago.'

'I never heard of her that I can remember.'

'No; she said you probably would not know her by name, although she knows you very well, and has something which she is anxious to tell you. Her great fear has been that you would arrive too late.'

'Is she dying, then?' inquired Clare.

'Oh, yes,' answered the other, in her quiet, placid way. 'Nothing could be done for her. She has sustained internal injuries and has suffered a good deal of pain, poor thing; but that is over now. Indeed, I think mortification has set in. But you need not be afraid of seeing her,' she added; 'there is nothing to shock you.'

'I should not be afraid in any case,' returned Clare, who had her own reasons for wishing to show that she had no timid shrinking from unpleasant sights; 'only I cannot imagine who she can be or why she wants to see me.'

'Well, will you come and ask her?' said Sister Jane. And she led the way up the broad stone staircase, Clare following.

A woman with a deadly pale face and large black eyes, which opened slowly and fixed themselves with a steady lack-lustre gaze upon her visitor—a woman who must have been handsome a few days ago—Perhaps the first apprehension which came into Clare's mind was not unnatural; for there is no denying that she was, as Adrian had asserted, very easily made suspicious. She was upon the point of saying that she would rather not be told anything that it might be better for her not to be told, when suddenly the name of Susan Bowman seemed to stir some faint reverberation in her memory.

'Have I not heard my mother speak of you?' she asked.

The woman made a sign of assent. 'I told her a pack of lies,' she said, bringing out the words slowly and with difficulty; 'but that hasn't done her any harm, I suppose. And her ladyship sent me away without a character.'

'Don't trouble yourself about it,' said Clare gently.

Susan smiled. 'That don't trouble me. But I've got to

die, they tell me, and I thought I'd see you first and let you know of something that you'll be pleased to hear. It wasn't worth taking so much trouble over a bit of work to unpick it all as soon as it was done ; but I don't seem as if I could get out of the world comfortably any other way, somehow. It's lucky for you that that 'bus-driver knocked me over.' She paused for a moment, and then added, 'It wasn't quite the fair thing to make you suffer, anyway ; for you've never done me a bad turn.'

'Why should I ?' asked Clare wonderingly.

'Ah !—but I did you a bad turn, I can tell you. It was I sent you those two letters about your husband.'

Clare's cheeks became pink. 'I ought not to have taken any notice of them,' she said. 'And—and I dare say you meant them kindly.'

'Not me !' returned the other, with the ghost of a laugh. 'No ; I didn't owe you any kindness, and that's the truth. I had my own reasons—may be they were bad ones. You were ready enough to believe a lie, though.'

'Was it a lie ?' exclaimed Clare eagerly. And then, 'But it could not have been a lie. I saw—'

'You didn't see what you think you saw,' interrupted Susan. 'It wasn't her ladyship whom you saw your husband kissing ; it was me. And he kissed me because I made him, not because he wanted to, goodness knows ! I tell you that now, in case I shouldn't have the strength to get through the whole story. But I'll try. You're a jealous sort of woman, aren't you ?'

'Yes ; I am afraid so,' answered Clare humbly.

'And you don't know much about men, that's evident. It will make you pretty angry, I suppose, to hear that your husband was in love with somebody before he saw you. He was in love with me, and I was his mother's maid. If you don't like that, you must—lump it.'

'But, indeed, I am not so foolish—that does not make me angry—I am sorry,' stammered Clare.

'He thought it would make you angry, at all events ; for he was frightened out of his life lest I should tell you of it. To the best of my belief, he hasn't been in love with anyone but you since his marriage ; but I shouldn't advise you to go on sulking with him as I hear you've been doing. He isn't the sort of man to make himself miserable for any woman's sake longer than he can help. I don't want to speak against

him, though. I don't think he treated me well, that's all.'

'Did he—did he promise to marry you?' asked Clare hesitatingly.

'Yes; he did. You may say that he was little more than a boy at the time, and that I was a fool for thinking the thing could come on again, after it had been put a stop to by his friends; but we most of us are fools—you in one way, and I in another, you see. My way was to take it into my head that I could learn to be a lady, and that a gentleman always kept his word. Well, if I had never been anything worse than a fool, I could die easier.'

'I think I understand it all,' said Clare. 'You must not tire yourself with talking any more now. It was very good of you to send for me.' And, stooping over the bed, she took the dying woman's hand and held it in a soft clasp.

But Susan's was a somewhat stubborn nature, and it is not likely that she felt any great affection for Mrs. Adrian Vidal. She drew her hand away, and answered, 'I didn't send for you out of goodness. As for talking, I'd as soon talk as not. You say you understand; but you must be cleverer than you look if you do. *I* don't understand it. I don't see why I plotted and planned to make him suffer. Where's the good of revenge? After all, I don't care—'

Her voice died away, and she lay for some time with half-closed eyes, breathing heavily. Clare did not expect her to open her lips again; but by-and-by she resumed, speaking, as before, with a slow, laboured utterance, and pausing between each short sentence:

'I swore I'd punish him, and that wasn't a difficult thing to do. He hasn't much pluck. I scared him by threatening to go to you and tell you how he had behaved to me, and he didn't defy me, as any sensible man would have done. I knew he wouldn't. That was how I got him to meet me in Kensington Gardens. I dressed myself to look like her ladyship, and I kept him talking till I saw you. Then I made him kiss me. He didn't half like it—though there was a time when he wouldn't have minded.'

'It was rather cruel to me,' Clare could not help saying.

'I didn't think about you; but I've put it right now. There's no harm done. Now you go home and make it up with him. There never was anything between him and her ladyship—unless it was on her side—and he's a good fellow

by nature. He used me badly ; but he's a good fellow. You tell him I said so—tell him Susan said so.'

Those were the last intelligible words that she spoke. She went on talking ; but her mind had begun to wander ; her voice became weaker and weaker, until it ceased altogether, and she sank into a sort of stupor.

Sister Jane, who had moved away at the beginning of the colloquy, returned now and bent down over the bed. 'There is scarcely any pulse,' she remarked, presently ; 'it will be all over soon.' Then she looked up at Clare's face, which was scarcely less white than that of the dying woman. 'Had you not better go away now ?' she asked. 'There is nothing more to wait for, and you look very tired.'

Clare nodded and went, without saying anything. She passed down the stairs and out into the street, and walked away, hardly noticing whither she was going. All her wrongs, all her misfortunes had been imaginary, then ! She could not yet rejoice at that thought ; there was room for nothing in her heart but bitter humiliation and self-reproach. Adrian had never been false to her ; all that he had told her had been true ; what he had concealed he had hidden from her only because he knew her jealous nature, and believed that she would resent what assuredly she had no right to resent. No ; there was nothing to rejoice over in that ; and what was worst of all was that she feared she had worn out his love. Never, surely, would it be possible to him to think of her again as he had thought of her once. Even she herself, though she had loved him all through, felt that something had been lost since the happy days of their honeymoon—something that neither repentance nor forgiveness could ever quite restore to her.

And she was right. Something had indeed passed out of her life, and would not return to it, however intensely it might be longed for. It passes out of all lives and goes by various names ; but most people call it Youth, which is perhaps as near an approach to a definition as can be reached.

CHAPTER XLII

'THE LAND WHERE ALL THINGS ARE FORGOTTEN'

ADRIAN had left his house in the morning without any more distinct idea of how he was going to spend the day than that he did not mean to spend it at home. There were a good many things which it behoved him to do—amongst others, it might be well that he should begin getting in his tradesmen's bills and forming some estimate of what he owed—but he did not feel equal to undertaking disagreeable duties, and in the end he sauntered down to his club and tried to read the papers. Whilst he was thus occupied, a note, addressed in Heriot's shaky handwriting, was brought to him.

'Dear Adrian (it ran),—If you will look in to-day or to-morrow, and rather to-day than to-morrow, I shall think it kind of you. I have been very bad this last week—about as bad as I could be—and I don't want to miss the chance of seeing you, now that I have a respite.

'Yours always, W. H.'

Adrian's conscience pricked him when he read this appeal. He had made only one effort to see Heriot since the latter's return to England, and on that occasion his friend had been too ill to receive him. Since then he had found one excuse after another for shirking the interrogatories which he was sure awaited him in Brook Street. He had never until now felt that his breach with Clare was likely to prove a final one, and so long as it remained unhealed the less that was said about it the better. But he could not refuse to visit the sick when directly begged to do so; nor, indeed, did his reason for absenting himself any longer exist. He could relate the plain facts now, and really it did not appear to him that he was open to the rebuke of any candid man. Such sins as he had committed he had confessed and asked pardon for. Heriot would hardly suggest that he should acknowledge himself guilty where he had been innocent, or that he should tamely submit to be disbelieved when he had pledged his word to the truth of a statement.

But he forgot all about his wrongs and his rights the

moment that he entered the bed-room where Heriot lay extended upon a sofa. When a man has been dying for a number of years, the end generally comes as a shock to those who have watched him ; and the first sight of his friend's face sent the blood back to Adrian's heart. Nor was he able to conceal his dismay ; for Heriot said at once, with a faint smile,—

'I have pretty nearly come to the last words of the last chapter, you see.'

'My dear old chap, I won't have you talk like that !' exclaimed Adrian, recovering himself. ' You've had a bad bout of it, that's all.'

But Heriot, still smiling, shook his head. 'No ; I have had my last bout but one. I don't want to brag ; but I think I may say that I have fought Death as long as any man could be expected to fight. Now he has got me down, and I am only waiting for the coup-de-grâce. The doctor told me plainly, the other day, that I had not the strength to rally from another attack.'

'How can he possibly tell ?'

'Perhaps he can't ; but I can. I know when I am beaten ; and, to tell you the truth, I am not very sorry to be near the finish. I have been through a good deal of suffering, as you know ; but I am not sure whether intense weakness is not worse. And I have no fear of death. Death, after all, is a release. Nobody knows what it is ; but I suppose it must, at all events, be that. Isn't it curious to think how very little speculation there has been upon the subject ? The whole army of humanity marching steadily on towards the same goal, and not one individual having the slightest idea whither he is bound—or caring much !'

'But we have some idea, surely,' objected Adrian, who was himself orthodox after a somewhat unthinking fashion, and had never doubted but that his friend was equally sound.

'You mean that most of us believe in the immortality of the soul, and that you and I are Christians. But Christianity tells us nothing about a future state of existence ; for I should think there are very few people who can accept the Apocalypse as a literal description of it, or would like the prospect if they could. For the rest, we have one branch of the Church believing in Paradise and Purgatory, while another declares them to be fond things, vainly invented, and sends mankind direct to Heaven or Hell, with perhaps just the shadow of a mental reservation as regards the latter. All these are only

names ; we can't conceive the meaning of them any more than we can comprehend infinity.'

'I suppose that is why speculation has always been felt to be useless.'

'Perhaps so. Still it seems strange that the mystery of our fate should weigh so little upon us. When I took sack upon my life, it appears to have been quite short—only a few years—and now eternity is close upon me. What is going to be done with me, I wonder ?'

'I know one thing, Heriot,' said the younger man warmly ; 'if ever mortal deserved Heaven, you do !'

But Heriot was not listening to him. '"The land where all things are forgotten,"' he murmured dreamily—'the man who said that was in no hurry to go there. But I don't know—it has a restful sound.'

'Not to me !' exclaimed Adrian. 'To me it sounds like a cry of despair. You can't wish to forget everything and everybody ; that would be tantamount to losing your identity altogether ; it is another word for annihilation. You can't wish for that.'

'I wish for rest, I think. A long, long sleep—I believe that is what I should like, if I could choose. The fact of the matter is that I am tired out. Adrian, old fellow, we have always been good friends, haven't we ?'

'Always, dear old man,' answered Adrian, getting up and seating himself nearer to the sofa on which Heriot was lying.

'And now we have to bid one another good-bye. As I tell you, I don't know what is going to become of me, or whether I shall be able to remember you in "the land where all things are forgotten ;" but I shouldn't like to be forgotten at once by you—or by your wife.'

'You know you won't be forgotten.'

'Well, not literally, I hope. And perhaps you will feel glad to have granted the last favour that I shall ask of you.'

'Heriot,' said Adrian, 'if there is any possible return that I can make for all the kindnesses that you have done me ever since I first knew you, tell me of it. The more difficult it is, the better I shall be pleased.'

'It's a little difficult—not very,' answered Heriot smiling. 'I only want you two to be friends again.'

Adrian groaned. 'I am afraid you have asked for an impossibility,' he said. 'I came here to-day thinking that you meant to lecture me, and I was prepared to defend

myself ; but I won't say all that I intended to say. I will only tell you that I have tried to make friends, and that I have utterly failed. She never had much confidence in me, and now she tells me plainly that she has none, and declines to believe my word. Don't let us speak about it any more.'

'Come, Adrian, you can't suppose that I shall accept that as an answer. Tell me what you were going to say, if I had lectured you. Tell me the whole history, will you ? I don't believe I have ever understood all the ins and outs of this matter. I am going to die, you know, so I can't betray your secrets ; and you used to think me a pretty good hand at giving you advice in difficulties.'

Adrian was not altogether unwilling to comply with this request. He said, despondently, 'Talking about it won't make it any better ;' but probably that statement did not quite accurately express his belief. He gave a very fair account of his married life, concealing none of its events, and not endeavouring to make out a better case for himself than the circumstances warranted.

'You see,' he said in conclusion, 'it's hopeless. Do you remember that evening when you came down to my lodgings at Polruth and warned me that Clare was a woman who could be easily made unhappy, and who could not easily forgive ? You might have gone farther, and said that there wasn't a chance of her being happy with me, and that she couldn't possibly forgive. She would if she could ; I don't doubt that. Last night she told me that she wanted to believe me—only she couldn't. It has been so from the first. It isn't in her power to trust me when appearances are against me ; and so I don't see how we can ever be friends. We shall not quarrel again, though, if that is any consolation.'

Heriot, who, during Adrian's narration, had been lying back with closed eyes and had made no remark, remained silent a little longer. 'Are you quite sure that you have told me everything ?' he asked, by-and by.

'Everything, upon my honour. You, at all events, will believe me when I say that.'

'You must remember that you have given Clare's faith in you some rather severe trials. How would you have liked it if she had received a letter from some man—let us say from Wilbraham, though that is scarcely putting it strongly enough—and had torn it to pieces before your eyes, sooner

than let you read it ? What would you have thought if you had found her in Wilbraham's house ? Supposing she had refused to enter into any explanations, but had simply said, "I am innocent, and you ought never to have doubted me ?" Supposing you had had the extraordinary magnanimity to promise that you would say no more about it, only stipulating that she should cease to receive Wilbraham, and supposing that she had gone on receiving him in spite of you ?'

'Really, Heriot, the cases are not parallel.'

'Of course they are not—from a conventional point of view ; but I want you to realise her point of view ; and I think, after all that has passed, you can hardly blame her for being a little more incredulous than you would like her to be. And if she is, never mind. You have only to speak to her in a certain way, and she will believe a contradiction in terms. Now, you know that as well as I do, don't you ?'

'I am not sure,' said Adrian dubiously.

'Oh yes, you are. Believe me, it isn't worth while to stand on your dignity with a person whom you care for. What you gain by it doesn't make up, by a very long way, for what you lose. And please to observe that I practise what I preach. I may have thought it a little unfriendly of you to stay away from me all these weeks ; I may have been fully entitled to say to myself that you might go to the deuce for me. But you see I didn't want to die without saying goodbye to you ; and so I put my pride in my pocket. Shall I part with the last shred of pride that remains to me, and make a confession to you which I have never made to any other living being ? Will you laugh at me if I do ?'

'It would puzzle you to say anything that would make me feel inclined to laugh just now,' replied Adrian drearily.

'Well, I don't know why I shouldn't carry my secret to my grave with me, except that I have a foolish feeling that I should like Clare to hear of it after I am gone. It is only that, if I had been a man who could think of marriage, I should have asked her to marry me years ago. There ! Don't make any remark about it, please. It is permitted to every man to dream—especially when his dream is beyond the remotest possibility of realisation. You won't mind ; nor, I hope, will she. And perhaps you will both understand better now why I wish so much that you should be happy together again, as you used to be.'

'Ah, Heriot, you would have made her happier than I ever can!'

'Don't talk nonsense. There is only one person in the world who can make her happy, and that is yourself. resign yourself to the fact that there is to be an end to your troubles; and in the meantime oblige me by looking a little less dismal.'

Adrian shook his head. 'I can't help it. You can't expect me to look cheerful when you tell me that I am going to lose my best friend.'

'It will be time enough to moan when you have lost him.'

'I have completely failed in my trade too.'

'Excuse me; you have done no such thing. You have had a slight check, which will make you more careful in future—nothing worse than that.'

'Besides, I am in a mess about money. I shall have to start again as a much poorer man than I expected to be.'

'I don't think you need let that worry you much.'

Adrian shrugged his shoulders. It was all very well for a rich man to make light of the ills of poverty; but he knew that they were real enough, though they might not be so great as the other misfortunes which he had to face.

'And now,' said Heriot, after an interval of silence, 'I must send you away. I am beginning to feel tired, and I shall have to stop talking. I want you and Clare to come and see me to-morrow afternoon, if you will. You can tell her all that I have said to you—except, of course, the one thing which she must not be told so long as I am alive—and as soon as you come in, I shall know by your faces whether the bad days are over or not.'

'I will bring her,' answered Adrian, getting up and taking Heriot's hand. 'And I promise you,' he added, 'that, if it depends upon me to put an end to the bad days, they shall be put an end to.'

'Thank you. I don't doubt you, and I have no fear. Till to-morrow, then.'

CHAPTER XLIII

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

ADRIAN'S heart was heavy as he walked away. He knew very well what it was that he had promised ; he meant to keep his promise, and believed that the result would be much what Heriot had predicted ; yet he could not look forward to the future with any feeling of hope or joy. It was probably true that if he spoke to Clare, as Heriot had said, 'in a certain way,' she would cease to doubt him ; but it seemed to him that it was not so much his pride as his self-respect that he was asked to sacrifice, and he could not think that Clare's love for him was capable of resuscitation by such means. The dead past could not, perhaps, be resuscitated by any means—certainly not by the kind of reconciliation which he foresaw. Still, it would please Heriot—poor old Heriot, who was neither poor nor old in the sense given to those words by the dictionary, but who, now that his life was near an end, could look back upon a greater measure of suffering than most old men look back upon, and whose lack of the good things of this world had been equal to that of many a so-called pauper. The tears came into Adrian's eyes when he thought of the man's quiet heroism and of the romance which had been so long and so successfully concealed. His impressionable nature had been profoundly moved by the revelation ; he had at once realised how many hundreds of stabs Heriot must have received and submitted to with a smiling face ; he pitied him with a pity which may have been more intense than the case called for. For, indeed, it is no such easy matter to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary in this world of shadows ; and the happiness that comes from dreams is at least as real, while it lasts, as any other kind of happiness. It is certain that Heriot would not at any time have consented to part with his dream. But Adrian was not cold-blooded enough to take comfort from analysis of emotion. He could only see the pathetic aspect of his friend's life. Never once had he heard Heriot utter a complaint of pain, physical or mental ; he had borne everything with the same unfaltering patience—a patience sublime and possibly self-sufficing, but

which had met with very little recognition, and could now meet with no reward—unless it might be ‘in the land where all things are forgotten.’

Those words kept on ringing in Adrian’s ears. To him, in the fulness of youth and health, they were terrible words. He could not conceive of a state of mind in which perfect rest should seem to be the chief good. He endeavoured to imagine what the *probable* awakening of the spirit, set free from the body, would be, and found, of course, that there is nothing upon which to base even the shade of probability. Who has not, at one time or another, striven with aching eyes to see through the impenetrable darkness which hangs over the grave? Who has not learnt that such strivings are vain? ‘They that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire,’ say the orthodox, and are content with that; ‘Death is at least the end of pain,’ say the heterodox, and seek to know no more; while those who halt between two opinions—are they not the majority?—can only turn away with a sigh and try to think about something else.

The latter course was undoubtedly that which Adrian would adopt in due time; but just now it was a little beyond his reach. He could not acquiesce quietly in anything that was sad or painful or incomprehensible; he must either put it out of his mind, or it must be explained for him. His was one of those natures which demand consolation, and which, fortunately, are ever ready to accept it, so long as it presents itself in an attractive form. The grey towers of Westminster Abbey and the bell tolling for afternoon service struck him as a sort of response to his unspoken appeal. He had intended to take the Underground Railway at St. James’s Park, and make his way home; but now he thought he would turn aside into the old Abbey, where so many generations of worshippers have found comfort for their souls, and see whether the influence of the place would not do for him what it had done for them.

He entered at the moment when the organ was pealing out the opening voluntary. The procession of clergy and choristers was passing into the choir, and he, following in their wake, slipped into a vacant stall. The congregation was not a numerous one, consisting only of some half-dozen persons scattered among the stalls, and of a rather larger number assembled in the transept. Adrian did not notice them.

Already he was beginning to find what he had come to seek. His senses were soothed and his nerves quieted by the gloom and coolness, by the shafts of coloured light that streamed through the stained windows, by the thick London atmosphere which penetrated into the building, and lent additional height and space to the pillars and arches and the vaulted roof. He felt the charm of the clear, sweet singing, and of the dignity and refinement which seem to raise the Anglican cathedral service to a somewhat higher religious plane than can be reached by the ceremonies of the older Catholic communion, with its strange mixture of grandeur and tawdriness, and its still stranger insensibility to bathos.

Adrian, however, was not occupied in drawing comparisons; nor, if the truth must be told, was he saying his prayers as he knelt there, his elbows on the huge musty-smelling volume which lay open before him. His wandering thoughts—led thither, perhaps, by the familiar chants and cadences—had drifted away to his school-days; to those old days when everything had been so plain and simple, and when the broad black and white which distinguished right from wrong, and truth from falsehood, had been obscured by no perplexing intermediate tints. ‘After all,’ he reflected, ‘one must go back to that, blind faith or no faith at all.’ In that solemn, ancient cathedral, the faith to which it owed its existence, the faith of childhood, the faith of the saints and martyrs, was less difficult to lay hold of, and the heaven of the Revelation, which Heriot had said that no man could desire to accept literally, did not seem a mere allegorical vision.

And when Adrian had mechanically risen to his feet and had looked up the anthem, what was it they began to sing? ‘Behold, I show you a mystery. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.’

Great is the power of words: upon Adrian it was somewhat greater than upon the ordinary run of mortals. Those magnificent rolling sentences, wedded to music not less magnificent, lifted him out of himself; he seemed to see the gates of heaven open and time lost in eternity, and could understand that of such a man as Heriot it might well be said, *Mors janua vitae*. Logic was not his strong point; he had not that fatal precision of ideas which is such a sad curb upon the imagination of those who possess it. In compensation he often reached the truth at a bound, and, having done so, never

cared to cast a backward glance upon the maze through which others had laboriously threaded their way to the same point. There was no valid reason why his doubts and perplexities should have been dissipated by the repetition of phrases which he must have heard a hundred times before ; but they were so dissipated, and that was all that he asked for.

When he sank upon his knees again he could look out on the present and the future with an altered gaze. The littlenesses and pettinesses of life had shrunk almost to the point of disappearance, and he marvelled that he had allowed them to loom so gigantic before him as to shut out all view of the hereafter. It will be understood that the power of seeing things in their actual proportions was denied to him ; he had always to look through a telescope or a microscope, or a diminishing-glass. But perhaps that is no such uncommon case ; and at all events he had now reached the happy conclusion that his long quarrel with Clare was but a molehill which his folly and hers had exaggerated into a mountain. He thought that if she were beside him at that moment it might be swept away almost without any need for speech. Then he started violently ; for his eyes, roaming idly this way and that, had fallen upon the north transept, where, with her chin upon her folded hands and a stray sunbeam lighting up her golden hair, Clare herself was kneeling.

It was evident that she was unaware of her husband's vicinity. Her head was slightly thrown back ; her eyes had a rapt unconsciousness ; her face wore a look of pain and humiliation. She might have passed for some suppliant sinner, asking of Heaven the pardon which it was vain to expect from man. But it was not in that way that Adrian interpreted her attitude and expression. He saw that she was suffering ; he thought he knew why she was suffering ; and he longed to step softly across the intervening space and whisper to her that she need be unhappy no more.

Since that was impracticable, he waited until the service was over, and then, following her as she passed out, touched her lightly on the elbow.

When she turned and recognised her husband, a rush of colour came into her cheeks, then ebbed away, leaving her paler than she had been before. 'I - I did not know you were here,' she said, in a bewildered, hesitating way. 'I was on my way back from the hospital, and I thought I should

like to come in for the service. You said you would not be home before dinner-time.'

'Are you apologising for going to church on a week-day?' asked Adrian smiling. 'I believe there is no law against that; but if there is, I am as guilty as you.'

He supposed that it was of the Children's Hospital that she spoke, and set down her agitation to surprise at seeing him. 'Shall we go home together?' he asked presently.

'Yes, if you like,' answered Clare; and then, with a sort of gasp—'Adrian, I must say something to you.'

'But not now—not now,' he returned hastily. 'I, too, have something to say as soon as we get home; I can't speak about it in the street.'

He called a hansom, helped her into it, and sat down beside her. Not another word passed between them from that moment until they reached their own door; but Adrian's hand sought Clare's, and though she did not return the pressure which he gave to her fingers, she allowed him to keep possession of them, and that was perhaps as much as he had any right to expect.

When at length they were within their own four walls, Adrian drew Clare after him into the drawing-room and stood, holding both her hands and looking into her eyes, which dropped before his. Hopeful as his mood was, he still thought that he had a task of some little difficulty before him, and great was his astonishment when Clare suddenly fell on to her knees, crying,—

'Oh, Adrian, do you think you will ever be able to forgive me?'

He stooped and raised her to her feet by main force. 'My dear child,' he exclaimed, 'what do you mean? I was going to ask you to forgive me. It was my fault that you didn't believe what I told you yesterday; but you believe me now, don't you? And if you don't, I can convince you—I am sure I can.'

But she drew back, saying, 'Stop! you don't know what a wretch I have been! It has been my fault, not in the least yours, from beginning to end; and there is no excuse for me, because, if I had been open with you, everything would have been explained long ago. I don't see how you can possibly go on caring for me after I have told you this; but there is no help for it—I must tell you.'

She sank down into a chair and partly covered her face

with her hands. ‘Don’t look at me !’ she exclaimed. ‘Don’t come near me until I have finished !’

But Adrian ventured to disobey this command. He seated himself close to his wife, put his arm round her waist, and drew her head down on to his shoulder. ‘My dear,’ he said, ‘you may be very sure that you have committed no offence against me that I can’t easily and willingly pardon.’

‘Ah,’ she cried, ‘you trust me ! I didn’t trust you.’

‘Trust me now,’ returned Adrian. ‘Tell me everything, and don’t be afraid.’

And so it was that by slow degrees the story of Susan Bowman’s revenge and repentance was unfolded.

CHAPTER XLIV

A LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

HERIOT had an old and faithful servant who had been with him since his college days, had accompanied him in all his wanderings, had nursed him through many illnesses, and had ended by becoming his friend and to some extent also his confidant. A few hours after Adrian had left him he sent for this man and said, ‘Sit down here, Graves, beside me ; I want to have a talk with you.’

‘Better let me get you to bed, sir,’ answered Graves, after scrutinising his master’s face. ‘You’ve had about enough talking for one day, if you ain’t had too much. That there Mr. Vidal, he comes here, and he sets and he sets just as if you was made of cast iron. I was very near knocking at the door and sending of him away this afternoon, I can tell you.’

‘Come now, Graves, you can’t accuse him of having given me too much of his company lately.’

‘No ; that he ain’t !’ growled Graves, who was not particularly devoted to his master’s friend. ‘He don’t trouble himself so much as to inquire at the door for weeks together ; and when he do come there’s no getting rid of him. He’s tired you out, that’s plain enough to see. Now, if you please, sir, you’ll just go to bed and let me read you to sleep. Here’s the evening paper just come in with a leading article that would send you off beautiful in five minutes.’

'I have no doubt it would, if anything would ; but I don't want to go to sleep just yet. Sit down, as I tell you, and don't irritate me. The doctor particularly said that I was not to be irritated. How old are you, Graves ?'

'Let me see,' murmured Graves. 'Forty-six—forty-eight—yes, sir, I'm as near eight-and-forty as it makes no difference.'

'Are you really ? Well, now, don't you think that at eight-and-forty it is about time for a young fellow to begin to contemplate marriage ?'

'No, sir,' answered Graves, with a decisive shake of his head, 'I don't. I know what married servants is, and I hope I know my duty to my employer. No incumbrances for me, thank you.'

'But what about your duty to Mrs. Anderson ? How long is it that you have been keeping company with her ? Twenty years ?'

'Scarcely so much, I think, sir ; but that don't make no odds. She knows I ain't one to change. She don't want to go running off to church at once, like a housemaid who's afraid of her sweetheart giving her the slip ; and if she did, want would have to be her master. I've told her often enough that I'm not going to leave you so long as you need me. 'And,' says I, "if that don't suit you, mum, why, you're welcome to look elsewhere."

'That is rather ungallant of you, Graves. Poor Mrs. Anderson may be excused for being a little impatient after such a number of years, and I am glad to think that her patience won't be tried much longer. My time is nearly up, Graves.'

'It ain't nothing of the sort, sir.'

'Graves, I thought you had more sense. I am at the point of death, and you know it. That is why I want you to tell me what you will do after I am gone.'

'I ain't going to speak about no such thing, sir—nor yet think about it,' returned the man doggedly.

'My dear old friend, do you suppose I don't know that you will be sorry to lose me ? But we must part, you see ; it can't be helped ; and I should like to have some idea of what your future is to be. Do you think of lodgings, for instance ?'

'Well, sir,' answered Graves reluctantly, 'Mrs. Anderson, she have spoke of it ; but my own notion was occasional waiting. It ain't wealth ; but it's a small certainty, and it

don't entail no risk. Now I've known a great number of men as has left service and taken to letting lodgings ; but I never knowed one yet as had capital enough to start clear. What with the crushing rent you have to pay in Mayfair or Belgravia—for it ain't much good to go anywhere else—and what with the cost of furnishing, you're a lucky man if you ever manage to pay off your debts ; that's my experience.'

'Yes ; but of course you know that I shall leave you something. Don't protest ; I am sure that you have never wished that I should die ; only you must, in common prudence, have counted upon coming into some additional capital at my death. And what I wanted to say to you was that I have had you put down in my will for a sufficient sum to pay for furniture and to give you a small income, but not quite sufficient to keep you in idleness. A man without an occupation is a miserable man, Graves.'

'There's no doubt of it, sir.'

'Do you remember how in Spain and Italy, and all those southern countries, we used to watch the people sitting for hours together in the sun doing nothing ; and how we used to wonder what they were thinking of all the time ?'

'They was thinking of no good, sir, that you may depend,' answered Graves. 'A pack of cut-throat villains, the whole lot of 'em—Italians, Spaniards, and Greeks, there ain't a pir to choose. When they ain't thinking of a murder or a robbery, it's long odds they're thinking about nothing at all.'

'Well,' said Heriot smiling, 'I dare say they often contrive to have no thoughts. They have raised laziness to the level of a fine art ; they are satisfied to exist, and don't know what boredom is. It isn't so with us northern people. We have no sun, worth speaking of, to sit in ; and we must be doing something, or else we lose our spirits and our health. I have never been fit to follow an occupation myself ; but I have very frequently felt the want of one. In spite of books and friends, and such interests as I could create for myself, I haven't always been able to fill up the hours ; and I shouldn't feel that I was doing any man a kindness by making him altogether independent of work.'

'I don't think you would, sir.'

'Yet, when one has a good deal of money to leave, and only a few people to leave it to, one is a little puzzled. You see, there is a certain class of persons who would work all the better, perhaps, if their daily bread didn't actually depend

upon it. Artists, for instance, and—and authors. If a man is in a hurry to get his job done and be paid, he can't give as much time as he ought to detail and finish ; and therefore I think that, to enable him to show himself at his best, one should try to place him out of the reach of money worries. Don't you see what I mean ?'

' May be I do, sir ; but there's some authors as isn't fit to be trusted with much money, in my opinion. Some authors would do a deal better if the money was settled on their wives—and tied up tight too.'

' That idea has occurred to me ; but I have seen some objections to it. The question, after all, is rather one of amount than of mode of bequest. Now tell me honestly, Graves—because there may be time for me to alter my will yet—what should you say was a satisfactory sum, neither too much nor too little, for a man in your position to inherit ?'

Graves looked distressed. ' If you please, sir, I'd rather not name a figure. I hope it 'll be many a long day before I inherit anything from you, and I believe I've saved enough to keep my head above water without any legacies.'

' Yes ; but you wouldn't gratify Mrs. Anderson by taking lodgings unless you had rather more capital, and I don't fancy the occasional waiting business for you. This isn't a subject about which you need feel the slightest delicacy ; for what doesn't go to you and to one or two other persons after my death will go to charities. Would 5,000*l.* be enough, do you think ? '

' Too much, sir, by half.'

' I shouldn't like to make it less. One must allow a margin for contingencies ; and it is possible, though I hope it isn't at all likely, that your lodgings might turn out a failure. So that is what you will get, Graves—that and a few trifles that I thought you might like to have as reminders of an old friend. And now about the other bequests. What would be your notion of the proper income for a literary gentleman who had better not be too rich, and certainly ought not to be poor ? '

' In addition to what he has got already, do you mean ? '

Heriot nodded.

' Five or six hundred a year, sir,' replied Graves, without the least hesitation.

' What ! for a married man who may have a large family ? I thought you would have put it at quite double that amount

To tell you the truth, I have made it rather more than double, and I am not sure that I haven't been stingy.'

Graves shook his head. 'I should have liked to have seen it settled on the lady, sir,' said he.

'Be satisfied, then,' returned Heriot laughing; 'half of it is settled on the lady. My old friend Mrs. Irvine will come into a round sum—you won't object to that, I suppose. And then there is that Children's Hospital that Mrs. Vidal is interested in; I thought she would be glad that it should be remembered. All the rest goes to different charities. There! I've altered my will I don't know how often, and I've given no end of bother to the lawyers; but I doubt whether I shall bother them again. Graves, you have known me a long time; you knew me before I was an invalid; you have been with me since I began to suffer, all those years ago, and you have seen me in pain and out of spirits and out of temper—'

'Never!' burst out Graves suddenly. 'Never seed you out of temper once, I'll swear!'

'Haven't you?' said Heriot consideringly. 'Perhaps not—perhaps I haven't shown it in the ordinary way. And now tell me, do you think that, upon the whole, I have borne it all like a man?'

Something prevented Graves from answering at once; but presently he said, in a gruff voice, 'Yes; you've bore it like a man.'

'Well, do you know, Graves, that is what I think myself. I hope it isn't arrogant. A soldier, you know, who has been through several campaigns and hasn't shirked death or wounds is entitled to call himself a brave man. You may say that he has no business to brag, because he has only done his duty, and he would have been a very despicable being if he had run away; still, I think it must sometimes be a satisfaction to him to be able to say to himself, "Anyhow, I am not a coward." That is the way that I look at my life. I haven't been a coward; though I have often enough felt afraid. Lately I have felt more afraid than I used; the machine is worn out, you see.'

He was silent for a minute or two, and then added, 'Mr. and Mrs. Vidal will be here to-morrow afternoon; you must tell them that I don't feel well enough to see them. I shall never see them again. After keeping up for so long, it would not do to run the risk of breaking down at the finish and giving them a painful recollection of me, and I feel as if I were

losing hold of myself. Well, I think I'll go to bed now, Graves.'

Graves got up without replying, and began to bustle about ; but all of a sudden he stopped in the midst of his preparations, stood still for a moment, and then hurried off into the adjoining room, where he had slept during his master's illness, slamming the door behind him.

Heriot was off the sofa and after him in a moment. He found the man sitting in the dark, with his face buried in his hands, and sobbing like a baby.

'Why, Graves, what's the matter ? What an old fool you are !' he exclaimed, laughing, though his own voice was a little unsteady. ' You mustn't do this sort of thing, you know. Didn't you hear the doctor say that I was to be spared all agitation ? '

'What do you go to upset me for, then ?' returned the other angrily. ' You've no regard for a man's feelings. Now you won't find me making a fool of myself like this again ; so I tell you. And you'll just please let me get you to bed, sir, and stop talking. It's enough to give any one an illness to go on like you've been doing to-night.'

Graves continued to grumble under his breath until his master was between the sheets, when he reverted to the leading article which he had recommended before as a soporific, and proposed to begin reading it aloud. But Heriot answered that he thought he could get to sleep without that.

'Good-night, Graves,' he said, holding out his wasted hand. 'I am sorry that I distressed you just now, but I couldn't help it. It had to be said some time. And, Graves, if the pain comes on in the night and you hear me call out, you'll come in at once with the medicine, won't you ?'

Graves nodded. 'You shan't have to wait, sir. But you'll have a quiet night, please God. Your eyes looks heavy, and I think you're going to sleep well.'

And so it proved. Several times after this Graves returned, and was reassured by the sound of slow and regular breathing. Then, being a light sleeper, and knowing that the slightest sound would awaken him, he lay down and took a few hours of rest. He was not disturbed ; but when, with the first glimmer of dawn, he stole on tiptoe into his master's room, there was nothing but stillness and emptiness there. Upon the bed, as if in slumber, lay what had once been called Heriot ; but the real Heriot, having faithfully performed the

task allotted to him in this world of pain and weariness, had received his message of recall during the night, and silently responding to it, had passed away to 'the land where all things are forgotten.'

CHAPTER XLV

NEW LEAVES

IT was on a sunny, hazy afternoon in the autumn that Adrian and Clare wandered out to the headland overlooking Polruth Bay, where one of them had been wont to sit in days gone by, and amuse herself with dreams which time had only in part fulfilled. As she sat down in the old place now, she seemed to see before her a future less romantic, perhaps, but more assured and more peaceful. She had lived and learnt, and had gained something and lost something by that process, as all must. The events of the past two years had changed her both outwardly and inwardly more than they had changed her husband, who had stretched himself upon the turf at her feet, and was unrolling one of a number of architectural drawings, which he had brought with him. This paper, labelled 'South Elevation,' he spread out and secured by placing stones on its four corners, and then,—

'Just look here a moment, will you, Clare?' he said. 'You see, here's the front door, with the dining-room windows on one side and the library on the other. He calls it south; but I've been over the ground, and it isn't south a bit; it's as nearly as possible south-west. Now the question is whether, when there's a gale (which, I suppose, will be about every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the winter), we shall be able to use our front door at all without having all our front teeth blown down our throats.'

'When there is a gale we will use the back door,' answered Clare; 'but it is a great mistake to imagine that there are more gales in Cornwall than anywhere else. If it does happen to blow, it blows rather hard, that is all. And during the winter the front door will be locked, because we shall be in London.'

'Shall we indeed? And where are we going to live in London, if it isn't an impertinent question?'

'In our own house, of course. Adrian, did you really suppose that I contemplated planting you down in Cornwall for the rest of your days ?'

'My dear girl, wealthy as we are, I don't think we can quite afford to have two houses ; and if it is a question between Cornwall and London, I give my vote for Cornwall without hesitation.'

'Then I give mine for London. It would not make me at all happy to have my own way in everything. This house is only being built to please me, and I should never enjoy living in it if I felt the whole time that I was keeping you away from your friends and your club and all the amusements that you are accustomed to. You know you hate the country.'

'That is just where you are mistaken, my dear. I love the country. I suppose no man ever was more sick of a place than I am of London, and I decided to have a house hereabouts, because I happen to prefer Cornwall to any other county in England. As for this particular house, I take it that it is being built, not to please either you or me, but to please your mother, who in an evil hour fell in with "the most promising young architect you ever saw," and of course had to find some employment for him, since nobody else seemed to be disposed to give him any. As far as I can judge, there is considerably more promise than performance about him. If he ever carries out his fell designs, we shall find ourselves the proud possessors of the ugliest and most inconvenient dwelling in England. I have been studying his features, which seem to express a happy combination of knavery and stupidity ; and I have been wondering whether it might not be worth while to pay him a certain sum in advance, upon the chance of his bolting off with the money and never being heard of again.'

Clare laughed. 'Considering that you are his employer,' she remarked, 'I should think you might venture to dismiss him without tempting him to rob you. Are you going to let your wife and your mother-in-law reduce you to a state of slavery ? Georgina thinks that is your only chance. Did I tell you that I had a letter from her this morning ! She assures me that since her marriage she had become more than ever convinced that either the husband or the wife should be a benevolent despot, and that the one whose will is strongest should always be placed in command.'

'Oh, indeed. And has she discovered that De Wynt's strength of will is phenomenal ?'

'So she says ; and as she has no doubt at all about my will being stronger than yours, she concludes that you must be made to obey, or else we shall both suffer for it. Her view is ——but, after all, I don't think I will repeat her view to you,' said Clare, with a slight laugh.

But Adrian lifted his handsome young face, upon which care had left no faintest indication of its passage, and looked up at his wife smiling. 'Let us hear her view,' he said. 'It is always amusing and sometimes profitable to be told what other people think of us.'

'What she thinks is not amusing,' answered Clare, who had grown grave. 'She says that we are not suited to one another, and that you will never understand me, nor I you. It isn't true, though. You don't think it is true, do you, Adrian ?'

'My dear Clare, do you believe that one human being ever did completely understand another ? As to our not being suited to each other, surely we may be allowed to be the best judges of that. I remember poor old Heriot saying the same thing to me once. It was long ago—before we were married.'

'Did he ?' asked Clare, a look of pain coming over her face. 'But he changed his mind afterwards—I am sure he did. I often wish that he could see us now. And yet, I don't know—it seems rather cruel that we should be happy, and that we should be making plans and discussing what we shall do with his money, and seeming to forget him—though we don't really forget. I wonder whether he would have approved of our establishing ourselves down here ? I wonder what he thought our future would be ?'

The secret which Heriot had kept so long and so well had been duly divulged to Clare in accordance with his wish ; but it had hardly affected her so painfully as it would have done had she realised its full meaning. Heriot, during his lifetime, had never seemed to her to be a man who could love or be loved in that particular way, nor could she feel that his love for her had been anything more than what he himself had called it—a dream. Perhaps the uppermost feeling in her mind was one of thankfulness that she had not been told sooner ; and it is not improbable that Heriot may have foreseen that this would be so.

Adrian, who was pulling up tufts of the sweet-smelling herbage and crushing them between his fingers, did not answer for a minute or two. He had felt Heriot's death more, perhaps, than Clare had done ; he certainly missed his friend more than she did ; but he hated all painful topics, and could not speak about them without an effort.

'That queer fellow, Graves, gave me an account of a long talk that he had with his master the last evening that they were together,' he remarked presently. 'The man told it very well ; I could fancy that I heard poor old Heriot's voice. His wish seems to have been that we should be well enough off to be independent, but that I should not fancy myself too rich to work. Well, I have no thought of giving up work ; only I shan't write any more novels.'

'Oh, Adrian, why not ? Not because the last one didn't succeed quite so well as the one before ?'

'That wouldn't be a bad reason. One ends by finding out what one can do and what one can't. I might go on writing novels indefinitely, and by taking pains I might, I think, always manage to attract a certain number of readers ; but no amount of pains would ever lift me into the front rank of novelists. I have the descriptive faculty, but I haven't the creative ; and that is like saying of a painter that he is an excellent copyist. You can make a living by copying ; it's a vocation like another ; but I can't conceive any one adopting it unless with a view to making a living. Now, I am not obliged to work for my living any more. We have what I suppose may be called a comfortable competence, and I think I am entitled to take up a kind of employment which may never bring me in any money at all, and which, at all events, can't do so for a considerable time.'

'What kind of employment do you mean ?' asked Clare wonderingly.

'I am going to write a history. Don't open your eyes at me ; it isn't such a wild piece of presumption as it sounds. Do you know why there are comparatively few historians ? Why, simply because very few literary men can afford to wait an indefinite time for payment. What, after all, are the qualifications of an historian ? Accuracy and diligence, to begin with. Everybody can be accurate and diligent if he will. After that, he should have a pleasant style, he should be able to sift the grain from the chaff, and he should know

how to put life into the personages whom he describes. Now, between ourselves, and as nobody is listening to us, I don't mind saying candidly that I believe I possess these gifts in some measure. I may not be a Gibbon or a Macaulay——'

'I don't see why you should not be,' interrupted Clare; and indeed she spoke with perfect sincerity.

'But, without aiming quite so high as that, one may perhaps earn a little credit for one's self and spend a few years very pleasantly in erecting a monument which may or may not prove more perennial than bronze. I've decided upon my subject; I mean to take the period of the First Empire. I shall not call it a life of Napoleon, though of course his will be the central figure; but just think of the list of his contemporaries! Pitt, Fox, Wellington, Talleyrand, Goethe, Madame de Staël—there's no end to them. And then the materials that one has to work upon! One's great difficulty will be the boiling of them down. Now, I know what you are going to say; it isn't new ground. But what of that? The history of such a period is always new; no one writer can exhaust all that there is to be said about it. Besides, I haven't any very formidable rivals. The "*Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*" is a tolerably well-known book; but how many English people have read it, do you suppose?'

'I have not,' answered Clare.

'You will have it to read now,' Adrian said laughingly. 'For years to come your days will be passed among the dead. I shall get you to take notes for me, and to write from dictation, and to do a hundred other disagreeable things; and every now and then we shall have to go to London to consult authorities. That will be better fun than having a house there, won't it? Of course, too, we shall have to visit Paris at intervals—not to speak of Italy and Spain, and every battle-field from Waterloo to Borodino. Do you know, Clare, I believe we shall be inconsolable when this great work is completed.'

Clare allowed herself to be gained by her husband's enthusiasm. New horizons opened out before her as he talked on; she saw herself becoming his companion, his helpmate, and his friend, and acknowledged to herself that such a life was at least more useful and dignified than the existence of perpetual love-making, which she had once longed for and still regretted a little. She was beginning, 'I wouldn't change places with

any woman living now,' when her sentence was interrupted by the sudden appearance of her mother, who was seen hurrying up the slope in a state of much agitation and breathlessness.

'Oh, here you are!' panted Mrs. Irvine; 'I have been looking for you everywhere to tell you of a most painful thing that has happened. I have just heard that that wretched young man has been arrested at Bodmin on a charge of embezzlement. Is it not too heartrending?'

'I have no doubt that I should feel it to be so,' answered Adrian, to whom this appeal seemed to be addressed, 'if I knew who the wretched young man was. Can it be—but no; that would be too good to be true. It isn't our friend the architect?'

Mrs. Irvine nodded solemnly. 'It is indeed; and I feel that I shall never be able to believe in the honesty of any distressed person again.'

'Oh yes, you will,' said Adrian encouragingly. 'I will venture to predict that the very next distressed person who turns up will command your full confidence. Only I do trust that no more casual architects will appear in these parts until Clare and I have got a roof over our heads.'

'You need have no fear,' replied Mrs. Irvine, who had taken her son-in-law's arm, and was leading him down towards the village. 'If a hundred architects were to come and beg me to find employment for them, I should tell them that they might as well talk to one of their own stone walls as to me. I have been taken in too often. Do you remember how poor dear Mr. Heriot used to laugh at me about the people whom I had tried to befriend and who had turned out badly? I always maintained that I had been exceptionally unlucky in my experiences, but I am beginning to see that there are more rogues than honest folk in the world. I shall turn over a new leaf now, and subscribe to the Charity Organisation Society.'

'We are all going to turn over new leaves,' Adrian remarked. 'You are going to give up indiscriminate charity; Mr. Irvine is going to give up enriching the curiosity dealers; Georgina is going to give up savage life; and Clare and I are going to give up writing novels and frequenting fashionable society and—and other things which it is unnecessary to specify. I wonder whether all of us, or any of us, will keep our resolutions?'

And then, as Mrs. Irvine, who had paused to exchange greetings with an ancient mariner, was evidently not attending to him, he turned to his wife, and said, 'What do you think, Clare ?'

'Perhaps, if we keep the resolutions that you didn't mention, it will be sufficient,' she answered.

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